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GREATHEART

ARTHUR H.  
ADAMS



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GROCER    GREATHEART

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*NOVELS BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

**A TOUCH OF FANTASY**

A Romance for those who are fortunate  
enough to wear spectacles

**GALAHAD JONES : A Tragic Farce**

With 16 Illustrations by Norman Lindsay

GROCER :: ::  
GREATHEART

:: :: A TROPICAL ROMANCE :: ::

By ARTHUR ADAMS



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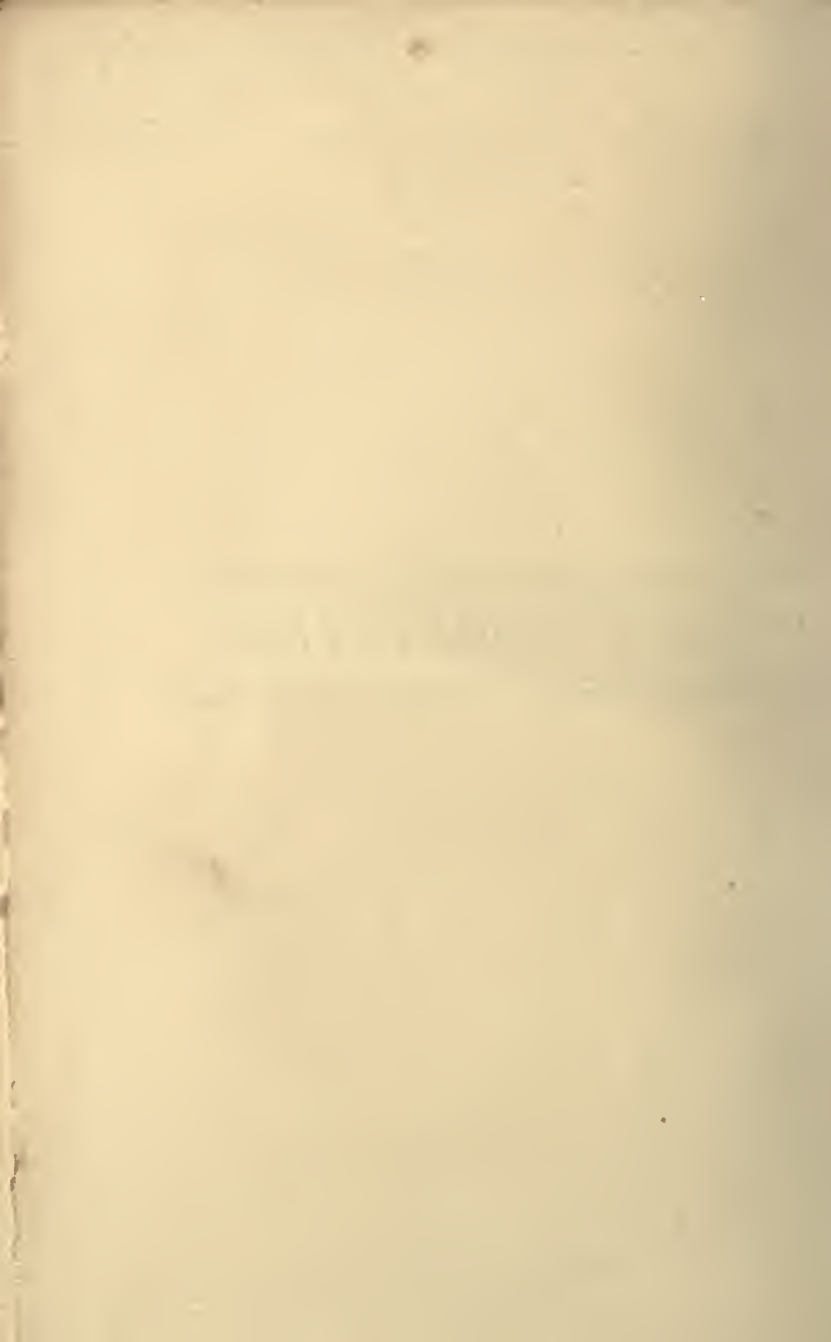
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GROCER    GREATHEART

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# Grocer Greatheart

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## CHAPTER I

### THE FRAGRANCE

THOUGH, of course, he must have been on the ship when it left Sydney, it was quite a week before I noticed Mr. John Greatheart. But he was the sort of man that you would only notice if he stood on his head—a feat, I feel sure, he would never have contemplated. And even in that contingency you would have merely wondered why so ordinary a man should do so extraordinary a thing.

But to me, a tired sub-editor, sent a trip to Japan by my Sydney directors, more for the health I needed to recapture than for the articles on trade conditions in the Orient that I was commissioned to write, all the passengers on the *Boomerang* seemed, at least at first, depressingly ordinary. As—that morning of departure from Sydney—I surveyed the company in which I was compelled to spend three

weeks, and made them out, in their travelling clothes, as monotonously dull as an editorial article, I said to myself with an air of desperate bravado, "I shall have plenty of time for my reading, anyhow."

And, when the "A. C. J." liner—which, as everybody in Australia knows, trades between Australia, China and Japan—plunged through Sydney Heads into the illimitable tumult of the Pacific, I with no bravado went below. For several days and nights I had not even time for my reading. But, once inside the calm waters of the Great Barrier Reef, I ventured to leave my bunk and climb wearily on deck. That day was a sample of a number of days to come. We were steaming in the current-swept highway between the reef and the interminable coast. On the right, were the scattered beacons and the white breaking shoals of the coral reef; and, on the left, the great stretch of low coastline unwound slowly like the ribbon of a titanic type-writing machine. And now up on deck dribbled the other pallid passengers and flopped wearily into the nearest deck-chairs. By that first afternoon of calm the passengers had begun to put out hesitating tentacles towards each other—a glance at the men walking the decks, an offer to fix a rug about a girl's chair, a casual remark about the prospects of a fine trip, mutual

confidences as to personal degrees of seasickness. People were beginning to sort themselves out with humanity's quiet contempt for those philosophers who assert that all men are equal. The process of natural selection is seen nowhere so swiftly and naturally at work as on the deck of an ocean liner.

At dinner, the vacant chairs were filled by men new shaven and women who had summoned up their courage to drag from their trunks their new dinner dresses; and everybody evinced a tentative interest in food. That evening there was music in the social hall, and four men sat down at a table in the card room to play bridge all the way to China.

Next day deck games were in full swing, and little groups, after a game, stayed chatting, each atom summing up the other atoms. The drops of Life on the ship's deck had begun to run together. Out of the original chaos Life had been created. Society had formed itself into tribes.

Unattached youngish man as I was, somewhat absorbed in what I then termed my own individuality, I felt no desire to become absorbed into one of those loose, colloidal groups. I stood aloof and dispassionately noticed how accurately the different layers of this chance-collected humanity stratified themselves.

At the top was the "society" layer, composed of a group of haughty dames, most of whom were conveying a highly groomed and becomingly decorated daughter for the parade of the world's matrimonial market. To this group flowed all the young men in check caps and heavy rubber-soled white deck shoes. I noticed a Rhodes scholar going home to forget his own country and become an Englishman, and an Oxford youth completing the education he had never begun by seeing what his mind would let him see of a world that annoyingly wasn't like England. I remember that he hurt me by referring to the continent that was my birth-place as a "colony."

Below this "Government House clique," or the "click," as it was sarcastically, yet with a quite obvious sincerity, labelled, was the larger, looser aggregation composing the bulk of the passengers. I noticed in it several Australian professional and business men, one a helplessly fat man with a commanding though fishy eye, none of whom could be bothered "dressing the part" for the "Government House set," and a thin little lady who looked like a successful boarding-house keeper—this was merely my guess, but I had had grim experience of boarding-houses. This group subdivided itself into conversational bridge fours, deck-

billiard sets, concert and sweep promoters, the inevitable sports committee, clans of elderly ladies who stitched little bits of scandal into little bits of fancy work, and the pairs who had already pre-empted all the dark corners of the deck and would soon revolve, like binary stars, round each other in orbits utterly removed from the atmosphere of the ship.

Then there were the unused fragments left over in the construction of this solid little world, and people who filled some modest niche so unobtrusively and so well that their presence was not even noticed. In the left-over class I enrolled myself with a foolish, defiant pride; and perhaps it was because I had not become, nor had I indeed been asked to become, a member of any particular group that my attention was drawn to another stray similarly situated. Thus it was that early in the voyage I became vaguely conscious of the anonymous entity that I subsequently learnt was Mr. John Greatheart.

. . . . .

It was, however, much later before I really took cognisance of John Greatheart, before he grew, as it were, from a passenger into a personality. He had a shy soul.



True, we followed our first casual conversation, which I have quite forgotten, with the usual non-committal morning and evening nods and passing remarks of fellow-passengers. And sometimes I caught sight of him lolling in a deck-chair with a book on his lap, the place carefully marked by a slip of paper. But I cannot ever recall seeing him reading. He used to lounge there, staring blankly out over the sea with as much expression in his pale blue eyes as there is in a pearl collar stud. I would come upon him wandering about the boat, climbing to the upper deck, gazing aimlessly at the second saloon passengers, studying the winch, poking about, always solitary, and, fascinated, peering for hours down at the engine-room.

Sometimes, too, I became aware of a small figure hunched in the cushions in the corner bench of the card room, watching with childish interest the absorption of the players and the onlookers in a game he knew nothing about. Once I glimpsed him taking a furtive drink at the bar. At meals he had a seat in a far corner of the saloon, where I noticed him always conscientiously intent on the menu, going stolidly through the whole gamut of courses. He was evidently doing his feeble best to adapt himself to this new life; and I felt sure that if

he kept a diary he would have had much of naïve interest to fill it with.

One afternoon, idly reading, I had glanced up at the empty deck—the heat even beneath the awning had driven the most energetic passengers into drowsy deck-chairs—I saw him coming down the deck in his uncomfortably hot blue serge suit and his drab cap. He paused irresolutely at a heap of discarded deck quoits and stealthily picked one up, poised it and threw it at the peg. It did not even hit it. At once he passed on nervously, as if he had not really meant to try his skill. Then he deliberately set himself to imitate the men he had seen briskly walking the deck for exercise. But, after a couple of turns, he tired of this foolish game, and shambled below, presumably to his bunk.

The picture of him, clumsily and diffidently trying to adapt himself to a life that came so easily to us, remained in my mind. He had arrived quite unprepared with the proper clothes for a tropical voyage. He had no white ducks, no soft shirt, no canvas shoes. But, so far, at least, he did not seem to have noticed his lack. His little drab cap was the only concession he had made to his new environment. And even that had betrayed him. His pallid face had become a rosy pink, and the sun had smitten his

nose—a nose so insignificant and deprecating that the sun seemed guilty of an impertinence in touching it.

Idly I began to become interested in him. On an ocean voyage you can become interested in anything. I began mentally to probe into his past life. Some clerk in some obscure office, perhaps, who lived in a dusty suburb and kept a few thin fowls. Married certainly to some large, matter-of-fact woman who went about in the mornings in a blouse hanging loose at the waist. And too many children. Whatever he had been or whatever he had done, I felt sure had been insignificant and commonplace. I supposed I should have passed him in the street in Sydney, or sat next him on tram or ferry-boat a dozen times without noticing him. I put him down as the sort of precise man who always doubles up his tram ticket and sticks it through his buttonhole.

It was an event of supreme importance—to people on shipboard—that led to us becoming more fully acquainted. We had sighted land—the first land since we had left Australia hull down to the south.

During the day the horizon had thickened from a line to a faint blur, from a blur to a mound, from a mound to a hill; and now, in the afternoon, we found ourselves close to a tropical



island. It loomed up with its rugged sky-line, its creased folds of forest, its little headlands laced with white beach. We all stood, vaguely excited, watching this new world opening to our gaze. This was not the low, bare coast of our continent; this was the wonder of the tropics.

Then, as the vessel swung nearer to the land to round a headland, the wind seemed to change, and to our nostrils came a waft of the most wonderful of scents.

It was penetrating, strangely and pungently sweet—an odour of unimaginable delight, shot through with a harshness that almost hurt. It was compounded, perhaps, of the rotting of tropical jungle, the sickly sweetness of strange orchids, the perfume of brown oiled bodies, the decay of monstrous leaves, the fragrance of crushed berries, the tang of monstrous seaweeds, the steam from sun-stricken swamps. There it was with all its disconcerting challenge, not sweet, not sickly, not so much pleasant as provocative. It was the East.

"Smell that?" said a voice at my side—a voice meek, yet enthusiastic. "What is it?"

I turned and found the thin little man.

"It's just the tropics," I said, for I had once been a trip to the Islands. So, from the fullness of my knowledge, I added, "They always smell like that."

"So wonderful as this?" he said sniffing. "I never knew there was a perfume like this. It's—upsetting, isn't it?"

All the passengers were sniffing, too, in a perplexed, expectant way. The Oxford youth, who was leaning over the rail with the most marriageable of the Australian girls beside him, looked into her pretty, foolish face questioningly. The strange fragrance seemed to have stripped his elegance from him. I caught a glimpse of something human and strong beneath his affectations of clothes and accent. And in the girl's eyes there was a strange, wild fear—as if in the dark her hand had touched a naked body.

Her managing mother, beside her, put out her hand as if to steady herself, to grasp something solid, to protect her child from she knew not what disintegrating influence. It was not proper that such nude perfumes should touch a maiden's nostrils.

The most magnificent of the business magnates on board was standing next her. Suddenly annoyed, he forgot to pull at his fat cigar. His puffy face and his waistcoat of magnificent distances seemed to shrink. His dead eyes stared as if to frown down this audacious visitant. Frankly he was offended, almost insulted.

The little lady who looked like a boarding-house keeper hurriedly put her silly handkerchief to her bright little eyes. And when surreptitiously she removed it her eyes had moist memories in them. She made a valiant pretence of having merely blown her eager little nose.

I was promptly recalled by the voice of the little man at my side.

"I say," he whispered in his excitement, "this is—it's Life, eh? Fancy living all your life and not knowing what Life is! It's glorious! I've never felt like this before—so turned inside out, have you?"

He seemed actually tall as he spoke. His thin frame seemed to expand. I felt that he was inflating his stuffy lungs, striving to gulp down that whiff of pungent fragrance, trying to get its subtle exhilaration into his blood.

And, I should say, his suburban blood needed it.

Then, just as magically as the spell had come upon the ship, it was broken. The fragrance, which a moment before had enchanted us, vanished. People looked round, dazed, as if to catch a sight of its vanishing ghost. The magic had gone.

It seemed to me that everybody looked ashamed. They glanced askance at each other.

Something had betrayed them. They felt angry, they knew not at what. The soft, languorous fingers of the East had caressed them. They resented the impertinence. The East has no right to take liberties with tourists.

Eagerly, feverishly, they turned to occupy themselves, to shake off the strange languor that oppressed them, to shudder away from that contaminating touch. Deck games were noisily arranged. Frail laughter filled the ship. Several of the men stealthily moved toward the bar. Restlessly I wandered over and looked into the card room.

There, in the corner occupied by the four bridge-fiends since luncheon, one man, whose partner had declared an original spades, put down four aces.

If any whiff of the mysterious fragrance had penetrated into this smoke-thickened atmosphere, it had not been noticed. The magic of the East has its limits.

. . . . .

Late that evening I was standing smoking the best pipe of the twenty-four hours, looking out at the dark bulk of the looming land. Almost abeam of us a volcanic peak glowed intermittently, like the red ashes of a giant's cigar.

I felt an unseen presence at my side. It was the little man. He edged closer to me, and, as I turned a little impatiently to him, his face seemed to have taken on a new quality of wistfulness, like the wonder of a child over the ever-opening complexity of his world.

He looked out at the distant blackness of an island.

"I wonder," he diffidently began, then relapsed into his pre-occupation. After a pause he ventured again, "I wonder what is going on over there?"

"That's an island," I said curtly, indisposed to this interruption to my tobacco-shrouded peace.

"Yes, I know. But what's going on there?"

"I suppose what's going on everywhere. Life."

"Yes," he eagerly clutched my platitude. "That's so wonderful. People are living there, people we know nothing about. Living their lives just as we are living ours, and knowing as little about us and our lives as we do about them. There they are, mysterious, secretive, in that dark little island, loving and hating, living and having children and dying. All that going on and going on, for centuries. And all of it so important to them—tremendously important—just as things are to us. For centuries. For ever. It upsets you, doesn't it? They



might be in another world. They *are* in another world, as far as we are concerned. Life's so big, so broad; and we're so suburban. I never had the remotest idea so much was going on outside."

He paused over his vague, childish wonder, deliberately savouring it. I smoked, but my tobacco had lost its balm. I was relieved when he meandered on.

"That smell, this afternoon—it was like a touch of the hand from them. It was like fingers in your hair. It's upset me. I didn't enjoy my dinner at all. The soup seemed oily. Did you notice it? I've felt restless ever since. Can't settle to my book. I feel I want to go there, just drop over into this quiet, warm sea and swim and swim."

"The sharks would be delighted," I laughed.

Evidently he had not thought of the sharks. His enthusiasm seemed to chill. We stood there staring out, a long time silent. His babyish wonder had aroused in me, too, a desire to know the heart of those strange lands, to explore these shrouded islands, to break through matted jungles on to strange desolate beaches. I was becoming childish.

"Oh," he broke out again, "it's wonderful seeing all this."

"But you haven't seen anything," I checked

him, angry at the mood he had induced in me. "To-morrow we may pass close enough to one of the shores—the mate was showing me the chart this morning—to see the natives on the beach, running along and shouting at the ship."

He was exalted. "Shouting what?"

"How can we tell? Just shouting."

"Yes," he eagerly took me up. "Calling to us and wondering about us—just as we are wondering about them. But we'll go past, and they'll go back to their lonely lives, and nobody will ever know. Strange peoples——"

"That you wouldn't like. Savages."

"Well, we were savages once. Primitive man."

He looked in his prim, precise littleness so unlike a primitive man that I almost laughed. I had to change the subject.

"Where are you bound for?" I asked.

"Round the world."

"A pleasure trip?"

"Yes. But I never imagined it would be like this. In the pamphlets I looked at the world seemed all hotels."

"Haven't you been out of Australia before?"

"I've never been on the ocean before—never outside Sydney Heads."

This was becoming interesting. I waited and got my reward.

"You see," he ventured, "it's like this. I'm a grocer."

He said it modestly. I encouraged him with a questioning "Yes?"

"You know Sydney? yes. I suppose you know Woolloomooloo?"

I had not an intimate acquaintance with that well-known suburb lying close to the heart of the city. I had met its name chiefly in the shipping reports and the police news.

"Ever heard of Greatheart's Grocery Store? It's in High Street."

I regretfully assured him that I had not had that pleasure.

"No, I suppose not," he quickly assented. "You wouldn't unless you lived in Woolloomooloo. My name is Greatheart, John Greatheart. I've built that shop up from a tiny window. It's probably the best known grocer's shop in Woolloomooloo."

I congratulated John Greatheart, and gave him my name with my hand. He took the latter diffidently—a cold slide of fingers in mine. If grocers ever shook hands I knew instinctively that was the grocer's shake.

"And you've retired, and are taking a well-earned holiday?"

"Yes," he said. "I've never had a holiday



in my life. The grocery business takes all a man's time—absorbs you.”

“What made you chuck it up?” I asked.

“Well——” He hesitated a moment, then, apparently reassured by my genuine interest, he took the plunge. “You see, eight months ago my wife died; and I felt at a loose end. She was more than a wife to me; she was part of the business. It was a terrible loss to me. I felt the lack of somebody to talk about the business with. We used to discuss everything together. She had a great head for the grocery business. I depended on her advice very much. And my children——”

“You have a son?”

“No; two girls. We wanted a son—to leave the business to. But nobody can say that my two girls aren't capable girls. I say so myself.”

He said it hotly, almost defiantly.

“After my wife's death they—they took charge. Oh, they know all about the grocery business. They know more than I could have ever taught them. They look on their father as out-of-date. I daresay they're right, the younger generation, you know. They say I've been too long in the business—got into a rut. But how could I help that? I've lived groceries all my life—they're my only inspiration. Not

that I regret it," he said bravely. "It takes a man's whole soul to appreciate the grocery business. Astonishing how much there is in it, how absorbing it becomes. Well, gradually my daughters began to take things out of my hands. Little things that I didn't at first notice. And when I spoke about it, they said it was their duty to help me now that their mother had died. Reasonable way of putting it, wasn't it, after all? But in a few months, before I realised it, they had taken charge of the shop. There was hardly anything left for me to do. And I will say it for them that they kept the business together, and I think this year will show a record profit. Oh, they're capable!"

This time there was a note of exasperation in the word—a futile sort of exasperation, like a foolish buzzing fly against the window-pane.

"And another thing," he went on with pride, "it's much easier to carry on an established business than to build one up out of nothing. As I've so often told them, that takes genius."

John Greatheart evidently had his modest pride.

"But," he went on, with a sigh, "I began to find the evenings hanging heavy on my hands.

I was always a busy man—you have to be spry in the grocery business. You wouldn't guess the tricks you've got to look out for. Competition: the big city shops, with their advertised price-lists and their branches all over the place. And I could not talk to my girls as their mother and I used to talk of an evening. My girls had settled everything before I mentioned it. They listened to me, of course; but I could see them glance at each other knowingly. They didn't want me. And grocery had got into my blood. It was my life work. But it was only when they pushed me out of it that I found how much it meant to me. It was like my wife's death all over again, you know. But I couldn't complain. I told myself that it was only my vanity. They were doing things, really, better than me. Well, it made me restless."

"Everybody wants a change sometimes," I threw him the old platitude.

He jumped at it. Evidently there had been heart-searchings before he made up his mind to pack up.

"I think what begun it was the pictures," he ventured.

"The pictures?"

"The moving pictures, you know—the cinematograph. There was nothing to keep me home in the evenings. I seemed in the way.

My girls seemed to take up so much room. They're fine, big, upstanding girls, you know. So I drifted into the habit of slipping out to the photo-picture shows. There was one just opposite my shop. Good for business, bringing people past the shop. And it opened my eyes."

"How?"

"Those what they call 'scenics,' sir."

The "sir" had slipped out at last. Once or twice before I had detected him in the heroic effort to prevent its utterance. He had been so long behind the counter.

"It was like this. They showed you places you had never seen. Places you might have heard of in a vague way, but these were the places themselves. Castles on hills and streets full of foreign people. And jungles, with natives in them, and the branches of the trees waving in the wind. That's real, isn't it? I used to get watching for the wind. I liked the ones where there was a real stiff breeze. I could feel the swish of it. And gradually all this life made me a little dissatisfied with Woolloomooloo and Greatheart's Grocery Store. I seemed to have missed so much in my life. It seemed I had not been alive. Big things! Bigger than groceries. After them my corner shop in High Street seemed a little bit mean and ordinary.

It was a new thought to me—disturbing. I was ashamed. But I went back to the pictures. They had got me. And then I found myself becoming irritable, restless. My daughters both noticed it. They spoke to me about it. They put it down to my age. They said straight out that I was too old—I'm only forty-six—and at last they hinted that I was in the way."

He sighed.

"I daresay they were right," he continued more brightly, "from their point of view. Ever noticed that everybody is right, from his point of view? And I suppose I was too old, not for business, but to appreciate their point of view. Certainly the pictures had upset me. I began to lose interest in the grocery. Then I thought to myself, 'Why shouldn't I see these places for myself? Why shouldn't I take a trip?' The girls said it would be the very thing for me, set me up. I could go and see how the grocery trade was conducted in the other world centres. After all, Woolloomooloo isn't such a big place. There must be some magnificent grocers' shops in London and New York, and perhaps I could learn some new dodges in window-dressing and all that. It was my girls who suggested that idea. But I put my foot down. I wanted a



holiday. It wasn't shops I wanted to see, but jungles."

"So you came here?"

"No, not at first. It took time. The place I first thought of was Melbourne. I had never been to Melbourne. But when I went to the railway office to get my ticket I noticed a lot of booklets that told you about all sorts of outlandish places. I started reading them, then I took them home and studied them. And that night I made up my mind to travel, to see all there was in the world. I've given myself nine months; but I'm not so sure now that I shouldn't have allowed myself more time. I don't want to rush it, do I? And I've washed my hands of the grocery business. I've given the girls full control of the shop. And now I wouldn't look at another grocery shop, not even if I was dying!"

I had never seen a look so inflexible.

"And when you've seen all the world?" I asked.

"That depends. I expected that I'd be back in Woolloomooloo within nine months, but——"

He broke off, momentarily puzzled, waiting for this new ferment within him to clarify.

"This afternoon, you know," he went valiantly on, "when we smelt that curious smell—that settled it. Something's got into my

blood. I'm different, somehow. Like as if I'd been born again, if you understand me. I don't think I understand myself."

He paused to contemplate the wonder of a change in so stable a personality. He turned to me with a puzzled face.

"For instance, this," he tried to explain.

"This?"

"Yes, me talking to you like this. I can't make it out. I don't know what made me tell you all these things. I just felt I had to tell some one."

"And what made you choose me?" I confidently laughed.

"Because you happened to be here, I suppose."

The naïvety of his explanation precluded any possibility of his offending me. I found the poor, little, mildewed soul strangely interesting. He was a discovery. I felt like a butterfly collector with a new brown moth in his net. It wasn't much to look at, perhaps; but it was a new species—at any rate in my net.

In my aloofness I did not pause to reflect that there must be millions of other specimens similar to this. Considering the terrifying number of grocers' shops, the grocer's soul must be quite common. My delight and curiosity must be put down to the fact that even the most typical

of grocers' souls was a new discovery to me. I had not gone out before collecting grocers' souls. I determined in my superior way to cultivate the little fellow.

I did not guess then, how soon my whole future, my life, even, would depend on Mr. John Greatheart, of Greatheart's Grocery Store, Woolloomooloo.



## CHAPTER II

## THE RAFT

I DO not know at what hour of the night I was so suddenly awakened. All I was conscious of, as I staggered out of my bunk and steadied myself against the cabin door, was that it was pitch dark and that the vessel was full of strange mutterings. And beneath those mutterings I heard a deeper and more ominous one—a steady crunching as if the ship were sliding over a rock.

Of course, I guessed that we had struck something. And at once an unreasonable terror seized me. I pictured a jagged peak of rock protruding through the cabin wall, imperturbably crushing me to death. I daresay I had read of some such horror.

A woman's shriek restored me to sanity. Obviously the first thing to do was to get on deck and see what was the matter. All I had to do was to open the cabin door. I flung my

overcoat round my shoulders and reached for the door latch. At that moment the electric light in the alley-way went out; and once again a blind horror overcame me. I was to be shut up in the dark—to be drowned in the dark. But fumblingly I found the door latch—one of those hooks that fit into a brass socket. But my trembling fingers refused to perform the simple task of unhooking it. It seemed hours before I managed it, pulled the door open, and plunged into the dark alley-way.

Others were there before me. I found myself in a crowd of almost demented human beings. We struggled up the companion-way in a tangled mass, women crying and men cursing, all with one object—to get out of this death-trap, to die, if need be, in the open. And, at last, more by the momentum of the crowd than by my own efforts, I was flung on to the deck.

I picked myself up, put my overcoat on and looked around. The sea was as calm as the night. The engine-room bells were clanging, and there seemed, away forward, to be a medley of shoutings and commands. I made my way to the taffrail and looked down. A white foam bubbled beside the ship's side, surging toward the bow. I recognised that the screws had been reversed, and that the vessel was gathering way, stern first.

I could see no land, no rocks, no breakers. What had we struck?

A babel of questions broke out behind me. I made out women in white garments clinging to men, children crying, men running to and fro. Everybody was asking what had happened. Nobody answered. Nobody knew.

An officer appeared at the saloon doorway. We rushed at him.

"She's struck something—no, not a rock. There aren't any reefs hereabout. Must be some wreckage—a derelict, perhaps. There's no danger."

Yet as he ceased speaking the ship gave a slow, deliberate lurch. The stars shook sideways, and remained sideways. The whole firmament had slanted over. Hanging on to the doorway I looked at the deck. It slanted at what seemed to my terrified eyes a dangerous angle. And, what was worse, it stayed at that angle.

Several people slid with it, and on top of them came a deluge of deck chairs broken loose from their fastenings. Through the saloon door I could hear the sound of breaking glass, the bumping of heavy articles thrown down, and, far in the interior of the vessel, a smothered shriek. Some forgotten woman!

The impulse tugged at me to go down and

rescue her; but I was, simply and starkly, afraid. Afraid to grope my way down there in the darkness and perhaps never be able to find my way out. If I was going to be drowned, every instinct in me called out that I would drown in the open air. I stayed where I was, clinging, an abject figure, to the slanted doorway.

Perhaps I may be permitted to make my excuses, though I know I would not allow anybody else to make his. I had been too long a sub-editor. For years I had spent my days, or most of them, in bed, my nights in the sub-editor's chair of a big Sydney daily. And the sub-editor's chair is the chair of indigestion, and ultimately, nerves. I was a worn-out wreck of the blue pencil. But, all the same—— Anyhow, I didn't go.

But a figure that was just beyond me near the door turned and pushed past me into the blackened, sideways saloon. The man had his coat on. He paused at the top of the companionway and struck a match. He, at least, was a hero. It seemed to me that his courage absolved me from cowardice. One out of all that huddled mass of humanity had heard that shriek and had not hesitated to go down to the depths. One out of all that cowardly mob was a man.

He had, at least, that insignificant ugliness that marks public heroes—the sort of face you

see with a shock when some great man who has rescued another under heroic circumstances comes up for the public presentation of his medal. It was John Greatheart! I had never given him credit for the quality of courage. I was grateful that there were grocers in the world. But not for anything could I, at that dreadful moment, have gone down into the slanted alley-ways of the stricken ship.

His little figure, with the death of the match, disappeared. I listened again, in an agony, to hear that shriek. There came up from the darkness only the ominous noises that had awakened me.

And then, after a long time, during which the ship seemed to cant slowly further over, the figure of a woman emerged from the darkness of the stairway—alone.

He had missed her. It was the woman whom I was sure was a boarding-house keeper, absurdly clutching a folded parasol.

"What on earth's the matter?" she chirruped brightly.

I told her that there was no immediate danger, and asked her if she had seen her would-be rescuer. She shook her head.

"He came down for me?" she repeated. "Yes, I did call out. It was so dreadfully dark down there. And he'll be down there now,



looking everywhere for me. Hadn't you better try and find him?"

The way she so casually put it made it seem so obvious a suggestion that I was simply shamed into action.

Somebody on deck shouted, "The boats! They're launching the boats!"

I cast one look at the stars and groped my way to the head of the companion-way. At the bottom of them, struggling up, with a lighted match in his hand, I saw Greatheart. In my relief I almost embraced a grocer. Together we got to the doorway; but the woman with the parasol had disappeared.

"She's found," I shouted above the creaking noises.

"Who?" he asked blandly.

I noticed that he had, while down below, managed to put on his trousers and an overcoat.

"The woman who shrieked. She found her way up by herself."

"I didn't see any woman down there. *Was* there a woman?"

"Didn't you hear her calling out? Didn't you go down to rescue her?"

"No," he said almost irritably.

"What did you go down there for then?" I asked, exasperated.

He said something that the shouting on the deck drowned. "What?" I shouted.

"My teeth," he cried. "False teeth," he explained at the top of his voice. "I left them in a glass of water on the wash-stand. I always take them out when I go to bed. Might swallow them and choke myself, you know. I had forgotten them."

So he wasn't a hero after all. I felt better, rehabilitated in my self-respect. A sudden absurd liking for him surged through me.

"Come on to the other side of the saloon," I shouted. "It'll be safer there. If there comes another lurch we are done for here."

"Right-o," he replied; and we clambered through the saloon and out of the other doorway. This side of the deck was quite deserted.

"Wait," he said. "They'll be getting the boats out."

We waited. Indeed, it would have been a hazardous venture to crawl along the deck, so slippery it was at that angle.

"I say," said Greatheart, "are we wrecked?"

"Looks like it," I muttered.

"Sinking?"

The answer came from the ship. It was like the sudden descent of a lift.

"Ooh!" he said, with a shudder, "to be ship-



wrecked, really shipwrecked! Isn't it an experience?"

I thought that fear had driven him mad. But the wild tone was not fear: it was excitement—the poignant thrill of adventure. Didn't the fool know that we should both be drowned?

. . . . .

After that I have some difficulty in recalling the exact duration of time or the sequence of events. I cannot tell how soon or how long afterwards we climbed the deck to the taffrail and saw two boats rowing clumsily off. I know we waved and shouted desperately at them; and a strange gibbering came faintly up to us. And then we guessed what had happened.

The men in the boats were Chinese. The Chinese crew and the Chinese stewards had rushed the boats—probably the only boats that there had been time to launch in the confusion—and had got in them. I cursed the folly that had led me to ship in a vessel manned by any but white men.

And, in the middle of my imprecations, I felt the deck lurch and leap up, and I heard a great roar in my ears.

The next thing I became conscious of was that I was in the water, struggling vainly against

the whirlpool that was sucking me down. After an eternity of blackness I found myself, gasping, on the surface. The sea was like a fierce tide-rip, with nasty little waves spitefully leaping at each other and spitting at me. No swimmer could live in such a tumult. I went under again.

But, even as I sank, my hand touched and clutched something. I found afterwards that it was a deck-chair. With its slight buoyancy this time I did not go under so far; and once again I saw the stars infinitely far above me. I lay spluttering, clinging to the deck-chair, with the vindictive little waves taking advantage of my efforts to take breath.

It must have been some minutes later before I caught sight of a white structure close to me. And on it, I made joyfully out, was a dark figure. I tried to call out, but got a mouthful of water instead. Then I flung out a hand and found a trailing rope. As I grasped it the figure clinging to the structure saw me, bent quickly down and reached my arm. No words were wasted as silently the man braced himself to lift me to him. I had little strength left to aid him, but at last he succeeded in dragging me to safety. I found myself on a raft, one of those things made of planking supported by two big drums of air.

In the starlight I made out the figure of my rescuer. It was the grocer.

I began to mumble my gratitude, but he stopped me.

"Don't lose that deck-chair," he said. "We may want it."

It was slipping past us, but I managed to catch it. I could not at that moment see any conceivable use for a deck-chair for shipwrecked people on a flimsy raft.

"I say," he said ruefully, as we got the chair on to the raft, "I didn't know it would be like this." He shivered. "Dead people drifting by, women drowning, and no chance to save them." He shook off his horror. "Anyway, it's the real thing, isn't it?" He said it almost brightly.

Had I as companion on a raft in mid-ocean a man who rejoiced in being shipwrecked? It sounded almost as if he were delighted.

"Hold on," he cried, as something thudded beneath the raft. I desperately clutched the rocking planks. Something that may have been part of a yard-arm rose slantingly beside us, with a dreadful scraping along the bottom of the raft, and, falling back, slid off in a swirl of broken water. And drawn by the current of its wake a white body shot straight to us, exactly as if swimming strongly. I tried to grab it, but Greatheart

was the quicker. He pulled it to the side of the raft.

"Dead, I suppose," he said, "like that other one."

It was the figure of a woman. Together we removed it to the raft. I recognised her then as the most marriageable of the daughters of the most managing mother of the mothers on board. That, perhaps, is not the right way to put it. All I saw then, by peering closely, was the remembered face of a noticeably pretty girl, probably drowned. The memory of her managing mother came afterwards.

I had some vague idea of the art of resuscitating the apparently drowned; and with Greatheart we tried it. To our clumsy, cold hands there was warmth in the beautiful body clothed only in a thin "nightie"—a thing now of piteously drabbed lace and cotton. To my delight and considerable surprise—for my methods were painfully amateurish—she revived and opened her big eyes.

"Oh," she murmured vaguely and sleepily, "where's mother?"

"She's been picked up by one of the boats. I recognised her," Greatheart said quickly.

The poor girl seemed satisfied, or perhaps it was that her physical exhaustion was too great for grief. She sank back on the planking and

closed her eyes. Greatheart gently put his greatcoat over her.

I looked up to see a floating piece of deck hamper to which some figures were clinging. We shouted to them, and one of the figures—I saw now there were three—made desperate attempts by means of a board to steer the clumsy thing towards us. It was not his efforts, however, but the current that, probably half an hour later, brought the two floating masses close enough for us to grasp the structure and pull the forlorn castaways to the comparatively greater safety of the raft.

The first of the three was a woman whom in the starlight I did not at first identify. The second was the Oxford youth, who, I remembered, had offended me by calling Australia a "colony." Even in a shipwreck he preserved the eccentricities of attire that had made him distasteful to me on board the vessel. He was now clad in a striped dressing-gown and flamboyant pyjamas. But it was he who had so strenuously persevered with the plank to reach us. The third was a man of great bulk—so heavy, indeed, did he feel, and so helpless was this mass of fat, that we had the greatest difficulty in raising him to the deck of the raft.

Once, as we struggled with this flabby, inert mass in its enormous pyjamas, Greatheart looked



keenly at me with a question in his eyes. I interpreted that glance. It meant, "He's so heavy that with his weight on the raft it won't be safe for the rest of us. Hadn't we better let him go?"

I felt that the grocer, from a common-sense point of view, was right; but I couldn't deliberately do it. If only he had slipped out of our hands and thus solved the question!

But we had him by this time half-way levered up on to the tipping raft. Greatheart nodded resignedly; and at last we got him out of the water and carefully shoved and pulled him to the centre of the raft. Any other position with so much dead weight was dangerous to navigation.

"I don't know," said the grocer, breathless but cheerful, as we settled the fat man into his place, "he'll be a sort of keel, won't he?"

"As long as he keeps in the centre," I replied.

"I'll see that he does," cheerfully the grocer assured me, with a new accent of decision that surprised me. Then, anxiously, as I was about to throw the bit of broken planking overboard, "Stop! Don't let go of that!"

He took the board carefully from me and placed it beside the deck-chair. He seemed to me to have a mania for collecting useless things at inconvenient times. I put it down to his grocerism.

We turned to look after the rescued. The woman was exhausted, but able weakly to thank us. She turned out to be the lady who, I was sure, was a boarding-house keeper. And in her hand she still tightly held that incongruous red parasol.

The first thing the Oxford youth noticed when we persuaded him to sit up was the Australian girl, now sitting up, too. Their glances met. With a gesture superb in its naïvety he reached over, without a word, and put his arms about her. She seemed to find some species of comfort in them. I thought, even at that moment, how pleased her mother—drowned by now, poor lady—would have been.

The fat man was our next concern. Instinctively we had left his enormous bulk for the last. He was, we found, more frightened than hurt. By the time we could attend to him, for there had to be kept a sharp look out, he was lying in the place where we had deposited him, softly blubbering. He did not even thank us for having rescued him. The mountainous mass heaved with his sobs, until his indignation found words.

“Disgraceful! Shocking!” he ejaculated pettishly. “There’ll be a public scandal about this. The captain ought to be hanged. The first thing I’ll do when we’re picked up will be to



despatch a wire to the Sydney papers. I'll have no mercy on anyone. The whole ship's crew ought to be tried for manslaughter. That's what this careless navigation is. Risking valuable people's lives, to say nothing of the luggage I've lost. I'll get damages, heavy damages. They'll be sorry they ever had *me* for a passenger."

I reminded this lump of childish anger that the captain and most of the officers of the vessel were in all surety drowned, and that our fate, adrift on a frail, overloaded raft, would have been kinder had it been as mercifully swift.

He looked frenziedly around into the mild darkness that the hemisphere of tropical stars made, and relapsed, whimpering. I recalled him, then, as the fattest and the most magnificent of the business magnates on board. He spent most of his time on board in a specially braced deck chair, with a dead cigar, by its girth somewhat resembling himself, erect in the corner of his sleeping mouth. Not exactly the sort of personage that one would choose to be shipwrecked with.

But there was no time to bestow upon him. Greatheart softly called my attention to a body drifting close beside the raft. And behind it, bobbing eerily, came another.

By the time we had got the first almost out of

the water we saw that there was no possibility of life in it. Though the face was slightly disfigured I thought it was that of the mother of the poor girl we had saved. Mercifully she was sound asleep in the youth's arms.

And when we pulled up the other body, part of one arm was missing and there was a dreadful wound in the thigh.

"Sharks!" the grocer whispered, with a shudder.

I was grateful to him for being a coward, too. "No," I said, "that was the explosion. You remember something blew up, the boilers, most likely."

"Perhaps," he muttered doubtfully, with a shiver of repulsion. "And these?" He indicated the dead bodies.

"Overboard," I whispered. "The women won't notice."

There was no need for our caution. The little boarding-house keeper was huddled with her back to us. We pushed the things away. They bobbed beside the raft, one seeming to us to stretch a despairing arm to clutch it. But it was only the suck of the waves caused by their sudden immersion.

Greatheart got the broken plank—which was worth saving, after all—and pushed them under and away. They floated in sight for a long

time. We had to watch them, fascinated, till they disappeared.

And then, for the first time, I looked around to see if there was any succour in the world. There was no sign of the ship, nor the loom of any land. We lay in the midst of a calm sea beneath a night of wonderful stars, six futile specimens of half-drowned humanity, an ill-assorted company indeed, without any food, insufficiently clad, adrift on a flimsy raft a few inches above the surface of the water: two women, a foolish youth, a whimpering fat man, a grocer, and myself—a coward. Not one capable man among us, not a leader who could deliver the rest of us from our desperate plight.

I was near to whimpering, too.

What I did was much simpler. I went to sleep.

. . . . .

I woke to find the dawn greying the sky. I sat up stiffly, feeling that I was in for one of my usual attacks of rheumatism. The women and the youth were stretched out on the raft, still asleep, and in the middle I saw the looming bulk of the fat man. But he had not gone to sleep on the discomfort of the bare boards. After I had sunk exhausted he must have discovered

and set up the deck-chair. At any rate, there he was, comfortably sunk in it, just as if he had dropped off for his usual doze on the shady side of the deck after lunch.

I felt absurdly angry with him; though, of course, as the chair was there he had done the most sensible thing in making use of it. Still, he might have had the politeness to have offered it to one of the women.

The grocer had evidently awakened before me, for he was standing up behind me, staring at the swift-coming dawn. He looked, in that strange light, and with the lack of background, something larger than a man, something more significant than a grocer. There was in his unconscious keyed-up pose a suggestion of the heroic. I had never expected to find a grocer heroic.

"Awake?" he hailed me cheerily. "I've been feeling a little bit lonely."

"You haven't been to sleep?"

"Don't speak so loud; you'll wake the ladies, poor things. Of course I haven't. Somebody had to keep watch. One of the boats might have come along, or a ship might have passed us."

"You must be dead tired."

"That's right, I am. But I wouldn't have gone to sleep for anything. It's been *such* an

experience. Wouldn't have missed it for anything. I never passed such an interesting night. Full of strange sounds—fish jumping out of the water, I suppose—and the stars were splendid. Can't remember when I looked at the stars last. And I'm glad I remained awake for another thing. Look."

He pointed to the deck at his feet. I saw that the grocer had been pursuing his hobby of collecting things while we slept. There was a small wooden box, a tin pannikin, a knife and a tomahawk.

"Where did you get hold of these?" I asked in my surprise.

"Oh, some came floating past, like those dead bodies, and I grabbed them."

"Tomahawks don't float," I reminded him.

"No; that was my greatest find, and my greatest disappointment. Actually a boat—a little boat—came in sight, drifting, without any sign of life. Just then there was a little breeze, and it came towards us sideways, till at last I managed to reach it. Nearly fell in, though."

"But where is it?" I broke in.

"It was waterlogged when I got it, right down to the gunwale or whatever you call the edge. There was a big hole in the bottom, I think. I saw that it was no use to us. But I felt over in the dark and groped about in the stern of it.



There was a little locker. That's where I got that knife and the tomahawk. I thought they might be useful—if ever we got ashore."

"But the boat—couldn't we have patched it up?"

"We're safer here. We might have got it seaworthy, of course, in time; but I didn't see how we could have got it on the raft, and if we did it would have sunk the raft. I tried to wake you up, but you only grunted. And I couldn't reach the others. I hung on as long as I could, and then I had to let go."

He showed me his fingers. They were bruised and bleeding.

"It jobbled against the raft, you know. I stood it as long as I could, and let go. It seemed to sink."

He nursed his hurt fingers for a while, then, with a start, looked around. "I wish the sun would come up. I've been thinking ever since there was any sort of light that there may be land over there."

I looked where he indicated, but I could not make out anything. "Better lie down for a while," I suggested. "You must be tired out. I'll keep watch."

"Go to sleep now, when the day's coming?" he smiled. "No, no; I'll wait till the sun rises."

"What made you keep awake?" I asked. I knew that it would have been physically impossible for me to have done so.

"I was afraid to go to sleep. And yet, I had my reward."

"The things you salvaged," I agreed.

"Oh, no. The wonderful night, the loneliness, the strange thoughts. It seemed to me that I had cast off everything that belonged to my old life, and had come out, fresh, to the beginning of a new existence. Everything seems new to me; I feel just as if I'd had a Turkish bath."

"I feel precious hungry," was my comment.

"Hungry? No; I don't feel that. There was something—sacred in that long night. Hungry? Yes, perhaps, hungry for the new life." He lifted himself to his toes. "Look!" he cried, thrilling, "there's the new sun!"

We stared at the new world that had flashed open around us with the rim of the sun above the horizon. The open sea, an horizon broken only by the edge of the sun, except——

Together we whispered, "Land!"

It seemed miraculously close to us, a peaked island, perhaps a peninsula, covered with thick bush. We took it in, gladly, gratefully, hushed by the miracle of its nearness. Probably it was ten or twenty miles away. Our landsmen's



eyes were of little use to us in judging distances.

"But how are we going to get there?" Greatheart muttered.

"Perhaps there's a current," I suggested dismally. Now the island had an air of mockery. We were helpless, at the mercy of the capitious ocean.

"That land wasn't there when the ship struck," Greatheart broke quickly in, "so we must have drifted in the night—a long way. So we're probably drifting still. The question is whether we are approaching the land or whether we will pass it."

We tried to estimate whether we were moving or not in reference to the shore; but after some minutes we gave up the attempt. It would take time to tell.

"Better rouse the others," Greatheart suggested.

I began with the boarding-house keeper. She sat up briskly with a matter-of-fact, "Oh, good morning," and then, with a dismayed glance at her attire, patted her limp, thin hair. The fat man, after a fusillade of indignantly protesting grunts, heaved himself to a sitting position. Even though he still occupied the centre in his deck-chair, the raft rocked with his struggles. Briefly I indicated the land.

The woman, after one quick, bird-like glance, turned again to the raft. At her feet the Oxford youth and the Australian girl were quietly sleeping in each other's arms.

"Poor dears," the little lady sighed. "It would be a pity to wake them before we must."

"Now," the grocer spoke sharply. "We'll need everybody's help."

"Let me, then," the little woman said gently; and, to my surprise, she did it with a light kiss on the girl's cheek.

The girl stirred, like a sleeping child, found the man's arms around her, and shamefacedly sat up. Daylight had brought Mrs. Grundy to the raft.

The youth was equally sheepish. The two did not look at each other again after that first swift, confused glance. The girl moved to the other woman's side and felt the comfort of the other woman's arm about her.

I looked again at the land. To me it seemed just as far off as at my first sight of it. The fat man stared, too, a grotesque figure in his tight, clammy pyjamas. He frowned, but no words came. But it was apparent that he quite disapproved of being shipwrecked and was inclined to put the blame on the rest of us. The others stared, too, blankly, fearing to give voice

to their hopes. Instinctively we waited to hear Greatheart's decision. At last it came.

"We're getting nearer, I almost think—no, I'm sure. But we're also drifting towards that point. It looks as if the current will take us clean past it."

"Then we can't get on shore?" the fat man demanded from his deck-chair. It was evident that he thought he had good grounds for complaint.

"How are we going to?" the grocer asked with a puzzled frown.

"My good man," the fat man expostulated, "I didn't get cast away on a raft to answer conundrums. You persuaded us to leave the safety of our wreckage for the uncomfortable close quarters of your raft. The least you can do is to allow us to step off it."

"Ah," muttered the grocer, who hadn't heard a word of the fat man's complaint, "I've got it. There's a chance—just a bare chance."

He picked up the broken plank he had so carefully saved. "We might be able to paddle nearer with this."

The Oxford youth, more perhaps to show off before the girl than with any hope of helping, seized the board and began clumsily to use it as a paddle. The result, of course, was merely

to set the raft slowly revolving. The island swam quietly round the horizon.

It did not take Greatheart long before he found a means to prevent this silly motion. "Give me that chair," he said to the fat man, who had by this time sunk down in disgust into its comfortable canvas.

"Why?" he querulously muttered. It was bad enough to be compelled to spend a night on a raft without being allowed to make himself comfortable.

"Because I want it—and at once," was the grocer's sharp reply.

The fat man, with one slow, astonished frown at the little man, heaved himself up with a grunt.

"Careful!" Greatheart cried. "Now you stay there, in the centre. Sit down. If you grunt again you'll capsize the raft."

Greatheart reached for the tomahawk, and, with my clumsy assistance, he succeeded in making with the sticks and canvas a couple of scoops, very inefficient makeshifts for broad-bladed paddles. He took one and I the other, and, putting the youth at one end of the raft with his board as a rude sort of rudder, we set to work on our apparently hopeless job of propelling the clumsy raft toward the shore.

To my surprise it appeared that we were

actually making some progress, helped, of course, as we were, by the current which was driving us diagonally toward the land. But to wield these clumsy paddles for long under a hot tropical sun was not the sort of work a sub-editor was particularly fitted for, and at length physical exhaustion compelled me to change places with the Oxford young man at the rudder. Greatheart kept stolidly on at his paddle. And when, after a while, I insisted on Greatheart giving up his oar to me, the little boarding-house lady asked to try her hand, with a not very serious diminution of the progress of the raft. Even the girl took a turn at the rudder. The fat man slept, saved from toil by his mere *avoirdufois*.

So the dreadful day dragged on. The unchallenged sun smote our uncovered heads. I felt that I was painfully sunburnt through my thinning hair. We were all famished; but so absorbed were we in our desperate struggle that we had little thought of our distress. Everything else could wait. We simply must get ashore.

Once, when it was my turn to rest, before I cast myself down on the raft I noticed the little box which the careful grocer had saved from the waterlogged boat. Blaming myself for my stupidity, I felt certain that here was food and



perhaps drink. Eagerly I prised the box open with the tomahawk.

It was a box of soap—the kind that floats.

The fat man roused himself from his lethargy sufficiently to turn savagely on Greatheart, a sweating galley slave chained to his absurd oar.

“Nice sort of thing to save!” he snarled. “Soap! Who wants soap here?” He seized the box to fling it overboard, but the Oxford youth prevented him.

“When we get ashore,” he remarked, “I should certainly like a wash. My hands are in a positively filthy state.”

It was plain now that our efforts had certainly brought us nearer the shore, along which, distant now only a mile or so, the strong current was pushing us. But the truth was in our quick glances at each other. We had a bare chance: that was all. Unless before we reached that projecting point ahead we could get closer in, we would be carried past the island.

We said nothing, but bent the more desperately to our work. The fat man, with, I fancy, no suspicion how close the race with death was going to be, had found the red silk parasol, opened it and held it above his blistered bald head.

Suddenly Greatheart stopped paddling, lifted

his hand and waited. Instinctively we all paused, anxiously wondering.

"Yes," he whispered excitedly, "there's a breeze, and in the right direction!"

Yes, we all felt it now—the steady impulse of a breeze blowing shoreward.

Greatheart's growing glance fastened on to the red parasol. He reached over, grabbed it from the indignant fat man, and held it to the wind. The Oxford youth, and I, without waiting to be told, held on to the ribs. A moment of suspense, and then we felt the raft thrill to this new impulse. We were moving, slowly, hardly perceptibly yet, inshore. And the breeze was freshening. The eddies in its wake told us of the raft's quickening progress.

"Everybody stand up," our captain commanded. "Yes, you," he added, as the big man hesitated. "You'll be better than a mainsail."

So, driven by the rising breeze, and under full sail—a red silk parasol and the wind area of a fat man—the little, light raft with its company of castaways forged ahead, straight for the last sandy cove this side of the cape.

The breeze held. We saw the beach, the tropical vegetation. The land grew around us. We sailed bravely on with the last of the failing breeze. It had been only a puff, but



it was sufficient. A long, light-hearted struggle with our paddles, and the raft grounded on the yellow sand.

And Mr. John Greatheart, the grocer, stood erect on the resting raft, his head back, sniffing.

“That smell! That glorious smell again!” he exulted.

## CHAPTER III

## THE CLASP

THE very full accounts published in the Australian Press of our first hardships on arrival at the island are probably sufficiently familiar to you to render it unnecessary for me to weary you with them here. For reasons which will be apparent, I decided in writing those articles to omit all mention of the really sensational incidents that marked our stay on the island. My articles for the Press were what I might term the official account of our adventure. That sufficed the public and my paper. It was an honest account of the shifts and expedients that we, in common with all castaways, had to make in order to survive.

Naturally, the true story of our experiences strongly tempted me; but I felt that I could not tell it in the space my editor would grant me;

and the opportunity of writing a true story that, I hoped, would read like fiction, prevented me from giving to the public what I may call the inside view of our adventure. I could have done it baldly, but then I felt that I should not have done full justice to the two protagonists of the drama. And—perhaps I may be excused if I claim this as my chief reason for my un-journalistic reticence—in fairness to those two actors in the events that followed I knew I could not, in the Australian slang, “give them away.”

There would have been a public outcry, an outbreak of that acid and wizened form of aggressive piety known in Australia as “Wowserism.” I felt that a broader morality would not condemn the action of those two persons. I respected their wishes and kept silent.

Now—two years later—I have the permission of both of them to give the full facts to the public in whatever form I choose. They have every confidence that I understand their motives and will write of them as they are, with, I hope, sympathy and fairness.

There was, perhaps, another reason why I reserved this account for a book. I have some standing as the sub-editor of that Sydney daily. I have a certain reputation for verity. I felt that

the adventures I have to relate were so astounding, so romantic, that, if I had ventured to include them in my Press articles, frankly I should not have been believed. I should not have minded that, personally, so much; but the credit of the paper I represented would have unfairly suffered. I may mention that on my return to Sydney I told the full story, in confidence, to the editor; and he supported me in my view.

So, for the newspaper public, I purposely "skipped" much that would, I doubt not, have been eagerly read, but with, I fear, a knowing smile. Thus my record of the doings on the raft omitted all reference to the red silk parasol. To my sub-editorial mind a red silk parasol seemed out of place on a raft. And even the fatness of the fat man, and the value it was to us, were but lightly touched on—out of consideration for the position he occupied in business circles in Sydney.

In short, the story I am, as I fear, but haltingly trying to tell was too true to print. If you prefer you can take it as fiction. As a fiction writer I have no reputation to lose.

How, after our arrival at that sandy beach, we secured the raft and made our way inland till we discovered a small stream; how we drank and drank, and even, with the help of the

salvaged soap, had a good wash; how we found the shell-fish—a sort of periwinkle—among the rocks, and very unwisely ate them raw, with painful results; how we came to a grove of cocoa-nut palms and chopped one down with the invaluable tomahawk; how we feasted on the green cocoa-nuts; how we sank exhausted in the scrub and slept that night, and toward morning were severally ill—all these, and other details, are too well known for me to clog my recital with them.

But though the way we made our fire formed one of the features of my Press articles, as it sheds some needed light on the characters of our nondescript company, I shall give it here. But, before that, it will be necessary for me to picture to you our forlorn appearance that first sorry morning on the island.

The girl—her name was Jean Liddicoat—had, perhaps you remember, only what had been originally a dainty “nightie,” now a piece of torn and draggled linen and lace. While the men were away that day, however, she and Miss Rice, the boarding-house keeper—I was right in my guess—must have got to work on it with the soap, for that evening, beneath the overcoat I had given her, the edges of her attire were quite clean.

Miss Rice’s nightdress was built more for

wear than for adornment, and over it she now wore Greatheart's overcoat. The fat man, Mr. Podmore, who was, he informed us, the leading partner in a big wholesale importing agency in Sydney, had his voluminous pyjamas.

The Oxford youth—his name was naturally Aubrey Bisscop—was almost comfortable in his dainty pink dressing-gown, made of some broad striped towelling material and pyjamas so loud that it was a wonder how he ever got to sleep. Greatheart had his coat and trousers over his nightshirt, and also his false teeth; while I had my modest sleeping suit.

A grotesque and miserable crew, as we stood up in the dawn, after our miserable night, and stretched ourselves. To my surprise, despite the exposure in wet clothing, I found that I had, so far, escaped my threatened attack of rheumatism.

The first problem was to make a fire. We were shivering. After our night's experience, it was impossible to rely on shell-fish, raw, as an article of diet. If we were to survive we must have a fire.

We had between us very few pockets to turn out for matches; and the hope I had had that Greatheart might possess a match-box was disappointed.

Into the disconsolate pause that ensued Miss



Rice threw the brilliant squib of a suggestion. "Couldn't we make a fire by rubbing two sticks together?"

We had all heard of the idea. Even Aubrey Bisscop stated that he had read of it when he was a boy. It was one of the few things he had read that had stuck. He became enthusiastic.

We set to work to select sticks. There were plenty, of every kind. We tried for probably an hour. We never got a hint of smoke.

Bisscop could not understand it. "I've read about it. I believed in it," he said gloomily. An illusion had been shattered.

One result we did get from our efforts. There was a perceptible warmth in our bodies. Podmore oozed.

Miss Rice, who had been indefatigably gathering sticks for us, sat wearily down—apparently on something hard. She stood up in surprise, and found no sharp rock on the smooth sand. Quickly she dived her hand into the pocket of Greatheart's overcoat that she was enveloped in, and produced a little polished metal box.

The grocer, with an exclamation, reached across for it. He pressed a button, the cap flew up, and before our incredulous eyes we saw a tiny flame. It was one of those cheap

pipe-lighters—a German invention, I fancy—that the tobacconists sell as a novelty. Afterwards I learnt that it was called a ferro-cerium lighter. Luckily the box was watertight. I daresay the inventor of this little toy never imagined that one day it would save six lives.

I looked round for something to light, but the grocer forestalled me. He pulled from his coat-pocket a pocket-book and flung it to me. I snatched from it some papers and held one to the flame.

To my surprise he jerked the lighter away. "Not that!" he anxiously cried. "Not *that* paper! It's too valuable. There's others."

The flame had been extinguished by Greatheart's violent action. But by shutting the box and letting the cap fly up again he had a flame ready for the old envelope I had selected from my handful of papers. With it I set alight a few dry leaves, and soon the fire was roaring with driftwood.

The grocer put the pipe-lighter carefully away, took the pocket-book, delicately folded the valuable paper within it, and returned it to his pocket.

"Somebody will have to stay and look after the fire," Greatheart remarked. "We must keep it alight day and night. We can't afford

to take any risks with this little lighter. I don't know how long the stuff in it lasts. Now, who'll watch the fire to-day?"

Podmore ponderously volunteered.

But Greatheart had other work for him. "The ladies," he said, "can do that. There's plenty of things for us men to do. We must get together a stock of food. Shell-fish and fruit. And there might be some wreckage to pick up. And we must get a better place to camp, and build some sort of shelter. And we ought to try and see if the island is inhabited—there might be cannibals, you know—or whether it is an island or not. But that'll have to wait. Now, we'll divide forces. Mr. Podmore, you had better go down to the beach and gather periwinkles."

The fat man straightway objected. "I didn't get shipwrecked," he petulantly said, "to cut my feet to pieces climbing over sharp rocks for oysters."

"But you'll love 'em when I've cooked 'em," Miss Rice murmured. "I'll come along with you and see if there's any shells I could use for a frying-pan."

"He won't have any unless he gathers 'em," said the grocer.

It was only then that I noticed a strange thing. Mr. John Greatheart, of Greatheart's

Grocery Store, Woolloomooloo, had elected himself our leader. Well, somebody had to take charge, and neither I nor the women could put forward any claim to the captaincy of our crew. Bisscop's glum face betrayed no eagerness for the honour. But Podmore, it was apparent, was a man of influence in his city, accustomed to obeisances in the importing trade. To be ordered about by an insignificant grocer was an insult. At Greatheart he glared, a bulgy offended moroseness in pyjamas.

"I'll do no such thing," he growled.

The grocer did not seem to notice his defiance. "Now, look here," he said briskly, "we're here through no fault of our own, and we've got to make the best of it. I didn't choose my companions, though I'm sure if I had had the choice I wouldn't have been without one of you. But if we're going to get out of this mess there must be some sort of give and take. In my business there must always be give and take. If you give too much you lose money, and if you take too much you lose your customers. It's the same in everything."

"What I'd suggest is this," I found myself, to my surprise, actually butting into the discussion. But I was, despite my experiences, feeling so strangely well, that I could not help asserting myself. "If there is any disagree-

ment between us, we'll put it to the vote, and the majority rules. That's fair, isn't it?"

Podmore merely glared and grunted, "Socialism!" But the others were with me.

"Well then, Mr. Podmore," I said, "you're in a minority. I suggest that for to-day Mr. Greatheart, who seems the only one of us with any idea of what to do, should allot us our jobs."

"I second that," Miss Rice bashfully murmured, with a soft, almost reverential glance at the thin little figure of the grocer. It set me thinking.

Thereupon Greatheart sketched out his campaign. Bisscop and I were to explore the coast-line to find if possible a better location for our camp, and at the same time to keep a sharp look out for any signs of wreckage. Podmore was to get a supply of the shell-fish and, later on, see what he could find in the way of tropical fruits. Greatheart would try to climb the steep hill behind us to discover if possible any signs of life on the island. Finally he offered to change duties with any one who was dissatisfied.

Podmore sulkily glared, glanced up at the densely covered hill, and then heaved himself deliberately down. He said he was too tired to do anything that day.



"Leave him to me," I said, with my new confidence; and I asked him to come along the beach for a stroll. This, at length, he consented to do.

Then I enlightened him. I told him of the difficulty we had had in dragging and levering his body on to the raft, and I did not forget to add that at one moment I had considered the advisability of letting him sink. I gave him the plain reasons. Then I let him know that it was the grocer who, at considerable risk to ourselves and the others on the raft, had decided to save his life.

"And on the whole," I concluded, cheerfully meeting his speechless glare, "I'm glad we did. It was chiefly owing to the very stoutness we objected to that we sailed in so comfortably. But don't forget that you owe your life not to that but to Greatheart. So do we all."

"So you wanted to drown me, young man?" he spluttered. "When we get back to civilisation I'll have you up for attempted manslaughter."

"Unless you get those periwinkles," I retorted with a new firmness that surprised me, "you'll never get back to civilisation."

There was nothing for him to do but to set to work.

. . . . .



It was Greatheart's theory that as the current had carried the raft toward the promontory of the island, it was possible that some wreckage would follow our almost unaided course. At the point we might pick up something of value. He particularly impressed me with the necessity of picking up anything at all, whether valueless or not. So, after an unsatisfactory breakfast of strange fruits and the cocoa-nuts we had saved, Aubrey Bisscop and I set off along the beach.

Curiously enough I felt a strange exhilaration as we trudged barefoot down the sand. There was a freshness in the air, a feeling of hope in my heart, and an unexpected conviction of physical well-being that I had not felt for many years. I was at the outset of a new adventure. After my monotonous life on the Press, this experience appealed to me, quite incongruously, as almost a "lark." I understood then something of the exaltation that had lifted the grocer above the material discomforts of our situation. All the world was before us. And it was a wholly new, a quite unexplored, world. What, for instance, I caught myself delightedly wondering, waited for us round that first projecting point?

Actually I found myself whistling—a thing

I had never done since my boyhood, save under the cold shower of the bath. And I could not recall when I had done that last.

And, remember, I ought to have been depressed and disconsolate, worn out with exhaustion, despairing of our chances of survival. Possibly I was experiencing what medical men prescribe when they suggest a "change of air."

Soon we had traversed the stretch of sand and found ourselves compelled to make our way over the rocks. With our bare feet this was not easy travelling, and Bisscop, after severely scratching his sole, broke his customary vacant silence.

"I've read of shipwrecks and all that rot," he began glumly, "but I never thought it would be like this. Thought it would be rather ripping to be shipwrecked, you know. Like camping out. Aren't there any natives here? I always thought there were natives on tropical islands. You see picture postcards of them, don't you? And then you build a big fire and a ship full of photographers and reporters comes along and takes you off. Gives a fellow a sort of standing to be a survivor of a shipwreck, you know."

"I'm afraid we're not likely to be rescued for

a while," I informed him. "There is little traffic on this line; and I heard from one of the officers that we were calling at a new port this trip that would take us a long way out of the usual track. But, of course, if anybody escapes—those Chinese probably will—they'll send a search steamer along by and by. And, anyhow, after we've been a week overdue they'll do the same. But I know it takes time to get a steamer for a search—and there's such a lot of islands they'll have to search. The chart showed that the ocean here is peppered with islands. At the earliest I reckon it will be a month."

"But surely there's a depot for shipwrecked sailors?" Bisscop asked.

"Not much chance here. They put them on the islands of the South Pacific; but I've never heard of any on these islands. Oh, we'll get off some time—if we can only manage to keep ourselves alive till then."

He sank, as it were, into the turbid depths of his habitual glumness. His face in repose had that clear vacuity of the English public school man—the ideal smoothness of vacancy toward which all the elaborate ritual of the English training tends. It is the mask behind which England has won most of her battles and made most of her bluffs.

"That fellow, Greatheart," he said at last, as we paused before a pile of huge boulders blocking our way, "he's some sort of beastly shopkeeper, isn't he?"

"Was," I corrected him. "He's a castaway now."

"Seems a bally bounder."

I thought for a moment. Perhaps he was. But, since the sinking of the ship, it had never occurred to me to sum him up.

"He may have been a bounder in Woolloomooloo," I qualified. "But here, I'm not so sure that a bounder isn't the sort of man who is wanted. Politeness is no use when you're fighting for your life. And the fellow you're fighting here is Nature, and she has no time to be polite. Look at us. You're an Oxford man—therefore presumably educated." You see, I had not been to Oxford. "I'm a trained journalist. Yet your education and my training isn't much use to us here, is it? Greatheart is a grocer, but he's a successful grocer; and you can't be a successful grocer without having acquired a tankful of common grocer sense. The sort of education he's picked up over the counter would be of no use in Oxford or on a daily paper. But it's just the sort of education—common grocer sense—that is wanted here now."

"Do I understand you to say that he, this grocer fellow, is the better man?" he incredulously asked.

"Infinitely. Why he's at home here. Actually enjoying himself."

"Enjoying this?" Aubrey Bisscop expressed his amazement and disgust by the only means his armour-plate features allowed. He slightly lifted the eyebrows that had been glued to his unwrinkled and unwrinkable forehead.

"Thoroughly. He's got the simple mind of the child. He's not astonished at anything. He demands nothing of life except that it goes on. To a child's mind this would be the most thrilling of adventures. And he's sufficiently a child to believe that thrilling adventures happen. The only thing he's perplexed about is that they didn't happen before. He's pretending, with all the thorough 'make-believe' of the boy. He's playing at being shipwrecked."

"Without his boots," said Bisscop, ruefully inspecting his scarred feet.

"Don't children just love to go without their boots, even if they cut their feet? Don't you see that this grocer has been a grocer all his life by mistake? What he was cut out for was a pirate. And now he's going buccaneering. He's going back."

"To savagery."



"Yes, to the primitive. In his heart, I fancy, the grocer is a prehistoric man. Perhaps," I wondered, "all grocers are prehistoric men. Perhaps we all are, though I don't see how prehistoric man got on without tobacco. Did you see how he threw his little head back when he smelt that tropical smell? He remembered it."

"It probably reminded him of the beastly smells of his little grocery shop—spices and cheese and things."

I was checked. My delightful theory wilted—and I had grown quite fond of it. I admitted that there might be something in Bisscop's suggestion.

"Even if he likes it at present," that youth went confidently on, "he'll be as glad as the rest of us to get back to civilisation. In his case it will be to his grocery store."

I agreed with him. This, considered, even with its inconveniences, as an experience, might be something to look back upon—in comfortable slippers with the tobacco jar at one's elbow. But I confess that at that moment my vista of the future always rested on the arm-chair, the after-dinner pipe, and the blest knowledge that it was Saturday night at home. For the nagging ache of tobacco was asserting itself.



I would have given the whole island for a well-filled pipe.

We set off again, rounding point after point, till at last we made our great discovery—a little bay strewn with wreckage. We ran down the beach, shouting. Woodwork, bits of lumber, broken boxes, kerosene tins. We turned them over in feverish haste. To our delight we found a battered case that looked as if it might contain something edible. We dented in one side with a big rock. Its contents were mixed pickles. We ate a bottle each, voraciously. I had never properly appreciated mixed pickles before.

Then, refreshed, we made a careful examination of the rest of the wreckage, and unearthed a varied assortment of more or less damaged foodstuffs, enough we calculated to last us for perhaps a fortnight.

Before returning we carried every bit of wreckage, save some timber that was too heavy, above high-water mark, and, taking a case of milk powder and a tin of mashed biscuits, we began our return march. As an afterthought I added to my load an empty kerosene tin.

"I say," said Bisscop, as we got back to the smooth beach again, "isn't that girl, Miss Liddicoat, stunning?"

"She's pretty enough," I admitted; "but of the two I prefer Miss Rice."

"The old 'un?" Bisscop's face almost expressed surprise.

"To be shipwrecked with, I mean. I admit that on board ship Miss Liddicoat would be the more attractive. In fact, I thought her the most attractive of all the girls on board. But, back here in the primitive, Miss Rice comes out on top. She's capable; she makes suggestions; she's willing to turn her hand to anything; she's cheerful. She's run a boarding-house, well enough to give her a trip to Japan; and that takes a certain amount of human nature and a big stock of shrewdness. But the girl is mere girl, pretty, no doubt, but no use here. I've no doubt she has all the polite accomplishments, but what's the good of being able to sing and dance and play the piano just now?"

"Oh, rot," said Bisscop, trudging on.

Rounding the last point we hilariously hailed the group about the fire. Miss Rice was busy cooking on a big shell the product of Podmore's gathering. She merely looked up, screwing her bright little eyes through the smoke, and bent again to her task. The other two, Podmore and the girl, who had been lying on the sand, rose and hurried to meet us.

While we were eagerly telling them of our find, Miss Rice noticed the kerosene tin. She took the tomahawk and battered it flat.

"I'll have a frying pan now," she gleefully said.

While we were sampling the tin of mashed biscuits we heard a "cooe," and the grocer stepped from the fringe of scrub.

He waited to hear our news before telling us that he had none. He had tried to climb the little peak behind us to discover the extent of the island, but had found the task too difficult. He was everywhere blocked by a mass of tangled undergrowth. The island, he said, was evidently of volcanic origin, as the ground was extraordinarily rough, being composed of jutting rocks—probably scoria—and the soft humus of rotting leaves and tree trunks. Nowhere in his short journey had he been able to get a look-out point over the forest. Thus he did not even know whether we were on an island or not. And the chance of seeing some sign of habitation, such as smoke, had been equally impossible.

"And now," he concluded, "as you've found that wreckage—good boys for hauling it above high-water mark!—we have plenty of building materials. We'll run up a sort of 'humpy' for the ladies to-morrow."

"Then you don't know whether the island is inhabited or not?" Bisscop gloomily concluded, as we men moved away from the smoke of the

fire, leaving the women busy at their immemorial job.

"Nothing definite, but——" He pulled his pocket-book from his pocket and opening it showed us a little article that glittered.

"I found this in the bush, close here," he explained. "What do you make of it?"

Each of us handled the thing in turn. It was a small clasp of bright metal, attached to a piece of pinkish elastic webbing. None of us could make out what it was.

"It's something belonging to civilisation, at any rate," I said hopefully.

"Which shows that there's some civilised people on the island," said Podmore.

"Or *was*," the grocer gravely corrected. "But whoever dropped this was here recently. You see the india-rubber has hardly perished at all, except at the end where it's broken."

Instinctively we men turned to stare up at the dark, towering wall of forest, almost as if we expected to see some one emerge from it, with welcoming hand outstretched.

Miss Rice, seeing us thus, came over.

"What's that you've got there?" she asked.

I handed the thing to her. "Greatheart picked it up in the bush," I explained. "We can't make out what in the world it is."

Miss Rice took it, glanced at it and blushed.

“Fancy you men not knowing!” she exclaimed. “It’s—it’s a suspender clasp, the thing a woman uses to keep her stockings up with.”

We men stared at each other.

A woman on the island! A civilised woman!  
With stockings!

## CHAPTER IV

## THE HANDKERCHIEF

THE whole of the next day we spent toilsomely carrying the wreckage from the shore to the camp. The work of getting the heavy timber over the stretch of rocks between the cove and our camping place took us till evening; and after dinner we were too exhausted with our unusual labours to do anything but sleep, with the stars for ceiling. Luckily it kept fine.

The next day Greatheart set us to work on the hut for the women, putting the job under my clumsy charge, while with Bisscop he made another attempt to discover whether the island was inhabited. This time he determined to explore the coast, as progress inland was impossible. He warned us that probably they would be away the whole day.

"It's this suspender clasp," he confided to me



as I accompanied him a little way along the beach.

He got out his pocket-book to look at it again ; and as he opened it a faded photograph dropped to the sand. I picked it up. It was, I could not help seeing, the portrait of a big, placid woman with the sack-like figure of the mother who has lost interest in herself.

"My wife," he said simply. "Taken a good many years before she died. I always carry it now. But she never, to my knowledge, wore suspenders." He mused a moment. "Poor Ann," he muttered, "she *would* have enjoyed this shipwreck. She always wanted to travel ; but the children came, and when they got out of hand she began to mother the shop. And now she's dead, and never guessed the fine times I was going to have. Well, well !"

He put both suspender clasp and photograph back. There was no grief in his words, just the resignation that comes to the middle-aged at the thought of the inevitability of death. No romance in that little dried-up body, I thought. And yet the gentle, unconscious, fondling way he touched that bit of pink elastic !

"You see," he went on, "this thing is worrying me. I lay awake a long time last night, thinking about her."

"Your wife?" I asked reverentially.

"No; the woman—the one who wore stockings."

"Of course," I hastily agreed.

"She must be on the island now. I'm certain of it. But where is she? I don't think the island is very large; and if she has been over this side lately she will surely come back. Of course she might have a lot of suspenders and never miss this one. But then she ought to see the smoke of our fire. Why is she hiding from us? What is she doing here? There must be a reason."

"Not necessarily with a woman," I reminded him.

"A woman always has a reason. My wife used to have lots; and my daughters always had too many for me. But I'm going to find out why."

I watched the little grocer set out on his romantic quest for the owner of a suspender clasp, carrying, like some mediæval knight, his lady's token on his breast.

I returned to my work, the erection of the shelter for the women. But though the job of building a "humpy," with the timber to our hand, seemed an easy one, we found ourselves, despite the full directions left us by Greatheart, making but slow progress. I discovered that I was incredibly clumsy, while Podmore, who,

in the grocer's presence, had simulated a sort of fat enthusiasm for work, loafed like a day-labourer now that his task-master's eye was off him.

It was really Miss Rice who took the job into her capable hands. She used the tomahawk with professional ease. She explained that in running a boarding-house, what with trouble with the servants, she had often to chop the firewood.

Meantime Miss Liddicoat lay lazily on the sand, making a feeble pretence of minding the fire. Since our arrival at the island the girl had said little. Miss Rice explained that she was grieving over the probable loss of her mother. That was why Miss Rice had hesitated about asking her to handle her share of the work.

I suggested that work was the best antidote to grief.

"She doesn't know how, poor girl," Miss Rice apologised for her. "She's so helpless. She's never had to do a thing for herself—not even her hair."

"Beautiful hair, too," I could not help remarking.

The girl's bronze hair was hanging over her slim shoulders, thick, wavy, glorious. On board ship I remembered it had been plastered into

tight rolls, tortured into elaborate designs of sausages, and fluffed out into absurd, but carefully controlled, curls, pinned and twisted and tamed and netted. It is a way women have with their hair and their souls.

Miss Rice unconsciously pushed back her thin and scraggy locks, already greying. "My pads went down with the ship," she sighed. "Perhaps it's just as well. I could never have worn them without hair pins. But I do hope that when we're rescued there will be some woman on board with a pad or two to spare."

"She's very pretty, even in that overcoat," I had to confess.

"Men!" the boarding-house keeper sadly smiled. "All you want is prettiness. You'd put us all back into the harem if you could. The Paris dressmakers—men, all of them—are trying to do that now. Though I admit that a harem skirt would be just the thing to be shipwrecked in."

By midday we had got the little shelter well in course of erection. After our scrappy meal Podmore insisted on having a rest.

"There is something," he admitted, as he lay at full breadth on the sand, a globular bulk beneath the shade of a tree, "in an eight-hour day, after all."

"Oh, I wish," the girl broke out petulantly, "I had some proper clothes."

"You'd only ruin them," Miss Rice reminded her.

"All my new dresses and hats!" Miss Liddicoat pursued her bitter reflections. "Made specially for London. And there they all are at the bottom of the sea, ruined. And now—just when I want particularly to look my nicest——"

"You do look your nicest now," Miss Rice beamingly reassured her, "with your lovely hair down."

"Oh, do you really think so?" the girl's vanity eagerly asked. "Aubrey said so last night; but I know my complexion will be ruined."

Both women were, of course, badly sunburnt, while Miss Liddicoat had been most decoratively freckled.

"But I suppose you didn't mind browning when you went in for surf bathing in the summer," Miss Rice reminded her. "Wait a few days and you'll be a most becoming brown. I never brown. I burst into flame. But, of course, it doesn't matter with me."

"No," the girl acquiesced, with the dreadful cruelty of youth.



Out of pity I had to say, "I think some colour suits you splendidly, Miss Rice."

The little lady almost blushed. She gave me the grateful glance of the woman who receives a compliment too late—the compliment that she knows might once have been true.

"I don't know what we'd have done without Mr. Bisscop," Miss Liddicoat went on enthusiastically. "He's so splendid, isn't he? Just the build of man that gets shipwrecked with a girl in novels."

Even Podmore agreed with Miss Rice's enthusiastic assent.

Before sundown the shelter was, somewhat shakily, upright, and Miss Rice hung a piece of sailcloth over its entrance. We waited for the arrival of the others till, on Podmore's petulant complaint that he had never been so hungry in his life, we made our evening meal.

. . . . .

It was late before we heard Greatheart's "cooe"; and ten minutes later the figures of the two were silhouetted in the light of our blazing bonfire against the darkness. They had extraordinary news to tell.

They had discovered a wrecked galleon and had heard a brass band!

But in answer to our quick questioning they admitted that they had not explored the galleon,



and had not been able to discover the musicians who played the brass band.

It was the galleon we wanted to hear about first. Greatheart insisted on calling it a galleon, though to me it seemed that he might have termed it, with greater exactness, merely an old wreck. But galleon was a word with magic in it; and the inherent buccaneer was rapidly coming out in the retired grocer.

At one point in their progress along the coast a jutting bluff opposed them. Laboriously climbing it, they found themselves looking down steeply on a little rock-walled cove. Across it a series of reefs showed white teeth above the scarcely ruffled water; and in a little natural harbour made by two in-curving reefs a thick spar slanted up. From the few feet of timber showing dribbled lank weeds. Peering closer, they made out from their altitude a dark bulk against the clean yellow sand of the bottom. From its sharply defined shape it could be only one thing—the skeleton of a wrecked vessel. From this fact it was a quick leap to the glorious inference that they were gazing down upon the hull of a wrecked galleon.

But there was no way down the cliff, and without a boat they could not have reached the wreck. And to examine it would need diving gear. There it lay, in its little sheltered dock,

as secure and intangible as doubtless it had been for more than a century.

"Oh," Miss Rice cried in her disappointment, "and there must be all sorts of things in that galleon, and we can't ever find out. Treasure! Why, they might have been pirates! Or it might have been wrecked and burnt by pirates!" She shivered with the deliciousness of it.

"That's what I said," Bisscop looked up from his meal to remark. "There's always treasure in Spanish galleons."

"But what good, even if we could have got at it," Greatheart asked, "would it have been to us?"

"What good, man?" cried Podmore, his fat little eyes bulging with the predatory instincts of the commercial man. "Why, there's tons of money there! Gold and jewels! Treasure!"

"Treasure?" the grocer flung it from him. "What we need is food."

"And clothes," Miss Liddicoat added.

"Well," the grocer said, "if this is any good to you, you're welcome to it." He tossed the fat man a little blackened disc. "Bisscop picked it up on the beach near there."

Podmore scrabbled in the sand for the thing. We pressed round to see. It was a piece of metal, tarnished and blackened, but from its weight evidently gold.

"A Spanish doubloon!" Miss Rice cried with awe.

It was certainly a gold coin; but none of us had had any acquaintance with Spanish doubloons; and it was impossible to make out any inscription. Podmore's pig eyes glittered greedily at the phrase. He fondled the coin eagerly.

"We'll form a syndicate," he said, "and when we're rescued we'll come back and make our fortunes."

"When we're rescued!" I exclaimed irritably. "You mean, *if* we're rescued."

"I think," Greatheart gravely answered, "that will be soon. There are people living on the island. There must be, else why is a brass band playing tunes on it?"

"The brass band!" Miss Rice exclaimed. "Tell us about it. Did you actually hear a brass band?"

"Heard it all right," said Bisscop, "but we couldn't see the rotters playing."

Greatheart explained.

They had gone on past the galleon, with the intention of continuing their way round the coast. But here a curious geological formation arrested them. Signs of some recent seismic movement appeared as a sharp cleavage across the island, resulting in a big, naked cliff that

stuck out into the sea, just past the cove, effectively barring all further progress along the shore. A great section of the land beyond had been lifted about a hundred feet, the ridge running back up the hills, curiously keeping to their formation, as far as could be seen. A giant hand had lifted half the island to a higher level, and left no gateway to the elevated land.

As it was impossible to creep round the base of the cliff where it fell into the sea, the explorers turned inland, paralleling the bare face of this rock wall.

It was astonishingly clean cut, only a few grasses clinging to its face, and the level strata of the rocks running in streaks along it.

At the first possible chance of climbing it they tried. But, though they managed to surmount the litter of stones at its base, the vertical face of the rock above showed them the hopelessness of their task. Then they pushed further inland along its base, struggling with incredible difficulties through a tangle of virgin primeval undergrowth. And after an hour's strenuous toil they discovered what looked like a promising ascent. Here there had been a slight fracture in the cliff that looked climbable.

But this attempt, too, ended in failure. By supreme efforts they managed to get up to within

some thirty feet of the top; but beyond that a naked precipice, leaning slightly outwards, brought them, exhausted, to a pause.

"We weren't flies," Bisscop explained.

"It was as bare as a false tooth," said Great-heart. "So we decided to come down, and try somewhere else some other day. But while we waited to get our wind we heard the music. It was—we're both convinced of it—a brass band!"

"Where on earth——?" Miss Liddicoat cried.

"It seemed to be in the sky," said the grocer.

"A brass band on the top of the cliff?" I demanded.

"It was somewhere over the face of the cliff," Bisscop explained.

"But what would a brass band be doing there, in the middle of the bush?" I insisted. "You're sure you're not mistaken? Some tropical bird, for instance? Sure it was a band?"

"It was playing 'Lohengrin,'" said Bisscop bleakly. "Playing it rather well, too, except that the brasses were rather too strong."

A jabber of excited discussion followed. If it was a brass band, there must be bandsmen. And why were bandsmen playing Wagner in a tropical jungle in a deserted island on a hot day? If bandsmen, there must be a town or settlement



there, highly civilised, too. And we in pyjamas and nightshirts, living on shell-fish and sopped biscuits and fruit!

"What did you do when you heard it?" Podmore was heard asking.

"Listened," said Bisscop.

"But after?"

"It stopped."

"But didn't you hear anything else?" I persisted. "Weren't there any other sounds? No applause, for instance?"

"Nothing."

"How far was it away?"

"We couldn't exactly tell," Greatheart explained. "You know how difficult it is to estimate the distance of sounds. Sometimes I thought it quite close—twenty yards away, at most—and then it might have been half a mile away."

"But didn't you shout?"

"Yes; but what was the use? The cliff leaned over us. Our voices would be carried in the other direction, away from them. So, after waiting a long time, in the hope they would play something else, we just climbed down and came back."

Well, we had perforce to leave it at that.

"There's one thing," the grocer added, as he turned to see what sort of job we had made with



the women's shelter, "we must explore every inch of the island. There must be some other way of getting over that cliff. There are people, white people, here, hiding."

"What from?" I demanded, exasperated.

"That's just what we've got to find out. They must know we're here. They must have seen the smoke of our fire."

"But if they're hiding," Miss Rice objected, "why should they hide with a brass band? And if they don't want anybody to find them, why should they tune up and give selections from Wagner?"

"That's what makes it all so exciting," Greatheart exclaimed brightly. "The island is becoming more interesting every day. Just think of our luck! We might have been wrecked on an ordinary tropical island, with nothing to do but to gather periwinkles and cocoa-nuts. And wouldn't we have been bored? No; this is something like."

. . . . .

That very night a thing happened that eclipsed in strangeness even Greatheart's puzzling discoveries.

The women went thankfully to the shelter of the "humpy" we had so stragglingly built,

while we men lay on a stretch of sand between the scrub and the creek. It was a night of tremendous stars. As I lay on my back, thinking over the strange events of the day, and vainly searching for their clue, I saw that sky of stars not as a hemisphere but in perspective. I seemed to look over a vast landscape dotted not with trees but with suns. I saw the heavens not as a painted semicircular dome of a ceiling, but as solid. I looked down endless avenues of stars, receding into the mist of infinite distance. Almost afraid of that threatening, thrusting immensity, I closed my eyes. The others were already asleep. Podmore's snores chanted a kind of cosmic tune. Soothed by it, I sank at last to sleep.

I woke with that curious suddenness that is instinctive in the presence of danger, instantly alert in every fibre. For what, even in my sleep, I had heard was a footfall. My ear was against the sand, and the earth-vibration, rather than the noise of moving feet, must have awakened me. Some instinct kept me motionless; but, fortunately, I was lying in a position that enabled me to look, without further movement, in the direction of the noise. That direction was toward the darkness of the scrub that fringed the shore.

And, as I uneasily watched, a figure detached

itself from the shadow of the scrub and made its way stealthily down the sand toward us. As it emerged into the starlight I made out that it was a woman.

She came quietly on, paused at the women's shelter, looked cautiously inside, then, apparently reassured, moved slowly and noiselessly down to us. And as she thus came nearer—I dared not move my head, but she was still in my line of vision—I took in this extraordinary vision.

A mere girl, dressed in some brilliantly sparkling costume that caught and struck back, as if from the surface of some lake, the warm starlight. The dress profoundly puzzled me. It was like no other that I had ever seen—except, perhaps, in the ballet of a musical play. It sheathed her supple body. There was in it, as in the lithe grace of her walk, something alluringly feline. Yet her attire suggested a sort of savagery. It was both barbarous and chic.

And in her hand, ready, she held something which I guessed was a revolver.

I could not clearly see her features; but to me, lying there new-awakened and overcome by the startling wonder of it all, the intruder seemed darkly, strangely beautiful.

Why did I not speak? There was so great

a mystery in this stealthy visit that I was held motionless in amaze, in which, I think now, there was mixed a half-fear. The thought of the incredible brass band, and a quick terror—probably born of my dreams—that it might suddenly crash out the splendours of “Lohengrin” from the fringe of the scrub inhibited me from the slightest motion. I am sure that if I had attempted to speak no sound would have come from my dry lips. If this strange figure was coming to rescue us, to tell us that help was at hand, why had she chosen this hour, why should she have come so stealthily, why should she carry a revolver?

It did not strike me at that moment that perhaps she might have been as afraid of us as I of her. Yet the appearance of us, stretched out in our tired sleep, half-clothed beneath the stars, forlorn and at her mercy, should have allayed her fears—if she had had any. But she was a girl meeting strange men. Perhaps she had a reason to be afraid of men, and was paying us this visit, unperceived, before she would venture to make herself known to us. But surely the revolver—to say nothing of the brass band—would have been sufficient protection for any woman?

Anyhow, I lay unmoving, and she came, with

that graceful cat-like stride, straight toward me. I closed my eyes.

I heard her soft step pause before me a long minute, every second of which, as I simulated a deep sleep, I expected, absurdly, perhaps, to feel the sharp prick of a dagger. I heard her soft breathing and the delicate rustle of her garments in that tremendous, appalling stillness. I even knew that she bent over me, peering into my face. Her warm breath brushed my cheek. Then, to my immense relief, she stood erect again and I heard her step on the sand as she turned away. I knew from the direction of her movement that she was going to look Bisscop over.

I ventured, cautiously, to open my eyes. She was in clear view, her back to me, looking into the upturned face of the Oxford youth. Her scrutiny of his features was brief, probably as brief as of mine. She straightened herself, with, it seemed to me in my excited state, a gesture of profound disappointment. It struck me that probably she had been vainly looking for a familiar face.

A quick turn of her little head—her hair was hidden beneath a sort of silver helmet—made me immediately close my eyes and breathe evenly and deeply. But I heard her move behind me to where Podmore lay, his snore for



once mercifully out of action. She did not waste much time on him, for, evidently, after only a careless, quick glance at him, she glided in the direction of Greatheart's little figure.

I knew I could now open my eyes. She was standing pensively above Greatheart, almost, it seemed to me, at her ease, inspecting him leisurely. She stood thus, it seemed, a long, long time. What was she thinking of? What did she find, to dwell so long upon, in the insignificant lineaments of the grocer?

Whatever she found, she appeared satisfied with, for she sighed with a kind of happy finality, and straightened that lissom youthful figure almost triumphantly. Then, with one last look—a remembering look—she turned, satisfied, to retreat, but, suddenly struck by a thought, she paused. I saw her lean swiftly over his figure and lightly touch Greatheart's breast with her white hand. I was specially struck with its paleness. I wondered if she was going to kill him or to kiss him. It might so easily have been either. And I know that, whatever she did, I could not have prevented. It seemed to me afterwards that all through that interlude I lay in a trance. The thing had the conviction, yet the vagueness, of a dream.

It was as through a mist I saw her sway once



more erect—with a soft chuckle. The chuckle woke me from my visioning—it was such a disarming, human, joyous contralto chuckle.

Then, without a further look around, she rapidly, noiselessly passed me. Had I been staring at her I feel sure she would not have noticed me. Her mission, whatever it was, had been fulfilled. When I ventured to open my eyes again it was to see her disappearing into the shadow of the scrub.

Even then I did not stir. I itched to get up and follow her, to overtake her, capture her—I thrilled at the thought of taking that soft, twisting feline thing in my arms—and ask her her woman's reason for the delightful chuckle. But I dared not. Despite the chuckle, she might be waiting for me in the darkness of the forest, contemptuously ready with her revolver.

I lay still a long time. Once I thought I heard a bough move, far up the hill-side. After that nothing.

Cautiously I stretched myself, as if newly awakened, conscious that there might be keen eyes watching me from the jungle. I rose at last and strolled across to the grocer. Really I was intensely curious. I wanted to find out what the girl had seen in Greatheart's face. Looking down on that insignificant figure I

noticed on his breast something white. Carefully I picked it up. By the paling light of the stars—it was nearly dawn—I discovered that the object was a little white rag; and, fingering it, I knew that it was a tiny handkerchief—a woman's trifle of cambric and lace!

I felt, almost with a blush, that I had stumbled upon some sacred privacy.

And as I stood there, perplexed at the meaning of the token, recalling the whiteness that I had mistaken for her hand, Greatheart wakened quickly, completely, like a child.

In an instant he was on his little feet.

"You're up early," he remarked, glancing at the swiftly coming dawn. "Others asleep? We won't wake 'em."

With a mutual instinct we moved quietly away from the sleepers. The dawn was about us like a misty sea.

"What's that you've got there?" Greatheart asked curiously.

"A woman's handkerchief, I should say."

"A what?"

I showed it to him.

"Where did you find this," he quickly asked, examining it.

"On the sand," I easily lied. I saw in a flash that I could not hope to make him believe the curious and quite purposeless act I had

witnessed. He would remain convinced that I had dreamt it.

"Whereabouts?" he snapped.

"Near where we slept. I picked it up as I was going to wake you."

"It wasn't there when we went to sleep," he commented. "And I'm sure it does not belong to either of the ladies. Miss Liddicoat got the loan of mine yesterday and Miss Rice made one out of sail-cloth. Whose can it be?"

Then I told him of our strange visitant, omitting only the tiny unimportant fact that she had deliberately dropped the handkerchief on his heart.

"The woman!" he exulted. "What was she like?"

I drew my imperfect, dimly seen vision of her.

"Beautiful and young? Yes, she must be that. And by herself?"

"With a revolver."

"The woman who wears suspenders. Did you see her stockings?"

I could not satisfy him there.

"A pity," he mused. "You see, if one of them was down that would prove that she was the owner of the suspender clasp. But, of course, it could only be her."

"But what's she doing here, coming like that,

and slipping away without a word?" I forlornly asked.

"Not without a word," he corrected me, folding the dainty handkerchief. "There's a whole book in this message. Well, it's a challenge. The woman has thrown down her glove. I'll pick it up."

I reminded him, a little irritably, that I had already performed that chivalrous act. But I did not tell him that I had robbed his sleeping heart of it.

"Well," he conceded, "we've picked it up. And we'll restore it to her. And, look here, don't speak of this to the others. It is all too mysterious. It would worry the life out of the ladies—and Miss Liddicoat would be sure to want to use the handkerchief. Sacrilege! But why this woman? I don't like it. No; I think I *do* like it. It's so—so adventurous, so thrilling, so enticing. And I used to think that the grocery business was full of thrills! Why, after this groceries are tame, tame! I've been asleep all my life. I'll find her. I'll return her her handkerchief unsoiled, and the thing that keeps up her beautiful stockings!"

The poor little arid grocer was becoming absurd. He was actually falling in love. And with a woman whom he had never seen. But

those are always the worst cases. Still, a grocer in quest of his lady!

"Come," I said, to quench his foolish ardour, for there is nothing so ridiculous, next to being in love yourself, as the sight of another in love, "I'll show you the way she went."

In the clean dawn we went back to the sleeping camp. The track of the girl's footsteps was clear, here and there, where the sand had not been disturbed. And it was the print of a dainty shoe, and, by the deep puncture in the soft sand, a very femininely high heeled one!

Not at all the footgear that a sensible woman would use in traversing a tropical, swampy jungle.

The grocer did not seem surprised when I pointed this out. It was increasingly evident that he was in love. He carefully erased the tell-tale marks.

"We'll see," he muttered, eagerly pressing on, "the way she went."

But the tracks, once in the scrub, were impossible to follow. Nor did we discover any opening through the forest by which she could have escaped. As far as we could make out there was no pathway—and the jungle was impassable without a track. At last we gave up the quest and returned to the camp, to find the

other men awake. But as we approached them Greatheart said to me :

“ I’d better keep this for the present, don’t you think? I’m the only one who has a pocket-book, you know.”

So into the pocket-book, to keep delicious company with the broken end of a woman’s suspender and, it must be remembered, his wife’s portrait and the mysterious paper that was too valuable to start a fire with, went that futile, absurd feminine rag, with which a woman charmingly pretends to blow her little nose.

And as I noted the ardent look on the little grocer’s face, a chill doubt shivered through me—a doubt of his capacity to get us out of our perilous position. What chance had we now, under the guidance of a middle-aged grocer, moonstruck, made mad by a rag of cambric and a pink elastic suspender?



## CHAPTER V

## THE FLAG

AFTER breakfast, without word of our visitor of the night, the grocer announced that he and I were going to explore the coast-line in a direction opposite to that taken when the galleon had been discovered. Our intention was to find an opening that would lead us inland, and allow us to climb one of the peaks that hunched their heavy shoulders above the velvet folds of the bush-clad hills behind us. From some such look-out point we should be perhaps able to settle whether we were on a small island or on a portion of a larger one, and possibly discover something important about the other inhabitants. As this time we were determined to explore inland, and as, in view of unforeseen obstacles, we might not be able to return to camp that night, we would take provisions for at least two days.

Podmore objected. "Staying away all night," he growled. "I don't like it. We won't be safe without you."

"Oh, nonsense," Miss Rice cheerfully protested. "There's no danger, is there?"

"If there was, I wouldn't go," Greatheart reassured her.

"I know that," she murmured, with again that look of ardent trust that sat so ludicrously on her plain, business-like, boarding-house keeper features.

Greatheart was blind to the illumination of her eyes. He was blind to everybody but the unseen woman he sought.

"We can look after the camp all right," Bisscop volunteered, and got his reward from Miss Liddicoat's swiftly raised and swiftly lowered eyes.

"But suppose," Podmore insisted uneasily, "we're attacked?"

"By what?"

"By savages."

"There ain't any savages," the grocer patiently explained. "The inhabitants of this island wear suspenders for their stockings and play brass bands."

"Well," said Podmore, unconvinced, "if anything happens to you, what'll become of us?"

"Oh, Mr. Greatheart," Miss Rice exclaimed, "you'll promise us you won't run any risks? For Mr. Podmore's sake," she lamely added, but too late.

Greatheart was flattered. What grocer wouldn't have been? But I regret to have to state that he strutted. He had vaulted his shop counter.

"You can depend on me," he proudly said.

But, perhaps, in thus describing him, I was a little jealous. He had taken so easily, so inevitably, the rôle of leader. It was plain that even the recalcitrant Podmore had unwillingly come to depend on Greatheart's capacity.

But I could not help uneasily wondering how much longer the grocer would prove worthy of the trust we had given him. He was deserting us, lured away on a wild-geese chase by a woman's handkerchief. He was rapidly becoming romantic. And, however delightful a romantic grocer might be in Woolloomooloo, as the captain of a party of shipwrecked incompetents he would be a calamity.

Yet, in fairness to him, it must be admitted that he was taking me with him. And he knew that I should not willingly abet him in any of his sentimental vagaries.

We set out, carrying our provisions and the tomahawk. Greatheart saw that the patent

pipe-lighter was in his pocket. In the direction we were now taking we had not explored further than the first rocky point. Beyond that lay the unknown, perhaps the haunt of suspenders and brass bands.

"There's no possible track through the bush the way the woman went," Greatheart said, as soon as we were out of earshot. "She must have come out of the scrub and down to the beach further on."

But at the first point we found that there was no hope in that clue. For to round the point we had to take to the rocks; and if she had kept to the scrub till she reached the point there would be no footprints for us to find. We presumed that this was what she had done, and went on, closely examining the stretches of sand, and keeping an observant eye on the fringe of forest for any possible opening inland.

At length we came to a great semicircular beach, whose horns were two big bluffs. Rounding the first of these, we saw a great grove of cocoa-nut palms, in front of which a curious-looking single palm stood sentinel. Here, anyway, was a permanent store of food.

But the appearance of the solitary tree interested us greatly. On approaching it we found that, instead of the straight, slender trunk, this palm bifurcated a few feet from the base into

two equal graceful stems, each surmounted by the usual bunch of drooping fronds. I had never seen so singular a palm before.

"Ever heard of a double-branched cocoa-nut palm?" I asked.

"No," he said, and then frowned at it. "Curious thing, I seem, though, to have heard the phrase before—a double-branched cocoa-nut—but I can't remember where."

He gave it up, still frowning. I thought it curious that he should be at such pains to recall the memory. But I suppose a good grocer's mind is stacked with what to us would be insignificant trifles.

"Anyway," I said impatiently, "this is one. Hadn't we better investigate the bush?"

Leaving the solitary palm, which looked of great age, we turned inland through the grove. The swish of the steady breeze sang its lulling tune through the bending trunks and the swaying fronds.

"Cocoa-nuts," Greatheart said, pausing and peering up at them, "I've sold cocoa-nuts, sold 'em in a barrow when I was a kid, long before I ever dreamed I was going to own a grocer's shop. And I used to eat 'em, too. But I never thought about 'em, never knew how they grew. To think I once sold these in a hand-barrow in Woolloomooloo!"

His strange little grocer's mind was away on its fantasies. Cocoa-nuts were cocoa-nuts—that was enough for me.

“Think of all the commonplace things a grocer sells,” he went on. “Sugar and pepper and rice and salt—all sold over the counter, all strange romantic things come from outlandish places, if we could only see them. I always thought keeping a grocer's shop was the most romantic of the trades—that was what attracted me to it when a boy—but it has taken this experience to show me that selling groceries is the most thrilling thing in all the civilised world—except, of course, being shipwrecked.”

“You can have all the thrill,” I said. “I want to have it over and get back home.”

“Go back?” he murmured; “yes, I suppose it'll end by our having to go back. You can't go on having adventures all your life, can you?”

He sighed; and together we went on.

No sign of footsteps marred the smooth expanse of sand; but just beyond the palm grove, hidden from us by it, we came upon a little river. We had not noticed it from the bluff.

We made our way, after crossing the river, which here was a wide expanse of shallow water, to a big rock that gleamed white in the distance,



and then what looked like a slight thinning of the scrub drew us further inland. We hurried on eagerly, and Greatheart, who was in the lead, shouted excitedly for me to follow.

He had discovered a track running into the forest.

Our excitement cooled on a closer examination. If this entrance into the forest was a track, it was a very old one. All that was discernible was a more open space between the larger trees, but the opening itself was choked with saplings and undergrowth. Still, it might have once been a pathway, and if a pathway it must lead somewhere.

While pushing his way through the tangle Greatheart caught his foot in some obstruction and pitched forward on his face. He was not hurt, but before picking himself up he bent to examine the cause of his fall. It was merely a tree-stump.

"Look," he cried, pulling back the moss-like growth that had covered it, "this tree was cut down. Here's the marks of the axe."

I agreed, but pointed out that that axe must have done its work fifty years ago. "Some shipwrecked sailors," I suggested. "They cut it down to build a hut."

"No," said the grocer, busily searching among the undergrowth, "here's the tree trunk,

almost rotted away. When they felled this tree they merely pulled it aside and left it."

"Must be a track then. Where to?"

Through the sturdy little saplings, over creepers that lay in wait to tangle and tear our bare feet, beneath the silky webs of gigantic, gorgeous-coloured spiders we pushed our winding way; and at last came out on the bank of the little river we had crossed on the beach. Here, however, it was a rushing torrent, bubbling busily round the base of a big rocky bluff. We recognised then that we were much higher up than the confused pathway over uneven ground had led us to expect. The first thing we did was to take a delicious drink.

"Here's where the track ends," I said. "This settles the question. Some ship came here once for water; and a party of sailors cut the track to roll their barrels down to the shore. They would naturally come inland to get purer water."

But this obvious explanation did not suit the grocer. He was always looking for the unexpected. The poor little fellow was determined, by now, to see mystery everywhere. For him the island was enchanted. Suspenders and lace handkerchiefs grew on every tree. It only shows that grocers should not be shipwrecked.

He paid no attention to my words. He was staring at the cliff.

"Perhaps the track goes on inland," he muttered at last. "It must. We'll climb up a bit and see what there is behind this cliff."

I followed him unwillingly. I believe he confidently expected to find a brass band at the top. It was, however, an easy climb, almost suggesting to us that the hand of man had helped in forming it. About thirty feet up we came to a ledge running along the cliff—a remarkable natural pathway, level, a couple of feet at its broadest, along which we had to proceed in single file. When he had gone about a dozen yards Greatheart gave a triumphant cry.

I peered eagerly over his shoulder. He had discovered the mouth of a cave.

"This is where the track leads to," Greatheart laughed excitedly.

"But it's only a cave—a hole in the cliff."

"Let's explore," he cried, and disappeared into the mouth of the cave.

I waited outside, on a little natural platform, and kept shouting to him in case he lost his way. It was a long time before he reappeared.

"It's a splendid cave," he said, blinking. "Smooth earth for a floor. Roomy—lots of space to stand up in. And I heard a trickle of

water somewhere at the back of it. But there's nobody there."

His disappointment was extreme. He must have expected to meet the girl in the darkness. But he soon revived.

"What a place to camp in!" he exulted.

I looked round. The natural pathway ended at the cave-mouth. Above, the cliff struck sheer up, and below us, except by the way we had come, it was unapproachable.

"What a place to defend!" the grocer muttered. "We two could hold it against a hundred."

"Who wants to defend it?" I said impatiently. "Who is there to attack us?"

"That's true," he admitted, suddenly abashed. "There can't be any danger from natives, or we would have seen some sign of them. It's a pity, isn't it? Up here, with our stock of provisions, and with water provided by the cave itself, we could stand a siege. It would be glorious to have to defend our lives here."

The grocer was becoming childish. I foresaw the day when I should have to depose him from his leadership. I was incompetent enough, but at least I was sane. However, curiously enough, I could not recall any instance

of a grocer going mad. But then, I had never heard of any grocer who had been shipwrecked.

"And the look out!" he continued, advancing to the edge of the platform. "We can see the whole sweep of the bay and the ocean beyond. No one could enter here without being observed by us, and behind these rocks we could lie unseen, watching every movement of the enemy unobserved."

It was quite true; but I pointed out to Great-heart that what we wanted, when the search steamer came, was to be observed.

"Well," he caught up my suggestion, though with his new rapture, "this is the very place to signal from."

But, like a child, he cast this idea from him, and took up his old toy. He was playing at soldiers again; and I had to listen while he sketched for me his grandiose plans of defence against hordes of the enemy. Who or what he conceived the enemy to be he left vague. The thing was, to his mind, quite simple. Here was a place obviously suitable for defence; hence there must be some one to defend it against. Otherwise there wouldn't be any game. It was only when I recalled to him the wonderful girl on whose quest we had started out that he reluctantly consented to return to earth. I believe, in his mind, he was already holding



the cave with her from the determined assaults of vindictive hordes of rival grocers.

We descended, recrossed the stream, retraced our path through the forest and came again past the grove of cocoa-nuts to the double-branched one that stood sentinel beyond it.

"I'm sure I've heard of a double-branched cocoa-nut before," he murmured. Then, gazing fondly back at the cliff, he pointed out to me that from the beach the mouth of the cave was completely screened by the rocks at its entrance. This afforded him considerable satisfaction.

At the far end of the cove, just above high-water mark, we made a discovery that promised something more valuable than an empty cave. A line of faint tracks, blurred by the work of the wind, led inland. Whether they were the track of a human being or—it was my suggestion—of a turtle, it was impossible to say.

Greatheart followed them almost at a run. He had forgotten all about his cave of refuge. He was merely the curious male on his eternal pursuit of the unknown female.

After several false trails we found a distinct track, quite unlike the clogged pathway we had found to the cave. This was a broad way, made comparatively recently, as we judged from the state of the broken branches that lined and strewed it; but how it had been made we could



not guess. No signs of trees cut down, no way cleared by axe or bill-hook—no touch at all, it seemed to our startled minds, of human agency. The track, winding and ill-defined, yet perfectly passable, had not been cut through the heavy forest; it had been *forced* through it. The undergrowth had been ruthlessly trodden down—but by what feet? Only by a large body of men marching in double file, it seemed to us, could this remarkable passage-way have been driven through the jungle. Great branches had been thrust aside, at a height above our reach, saplings and bushes twisted awry, clinging, thorny creepers bruised into inoffensiveness, overhanging boughs torn as if by giant hands. It gave us the impression of some vast, relentless might struggling irresistibly, triumphantly, onward. In my incredulous mind I had images of some traction-engine, or some steam-roller used for road making. But no steam-engine, no motor lorry, could have made its lumbering way over that slushy soil. Whatever the agency employed to make the track it was not unintelligent. It had not gone on blindly: it had chosen the best track, twisting aside when a big tree blocked its progress, and more than once retracing its steps to find an easier way.

Greatheart, of course, had his grandiloquent idea. "It's been made by some enormous

animal," he suggested in a tone that disguised its awe by its sense of adventure. He had never expected a mystery so beautifully unexplainable as this. The enchanted island was living up to its reputation.

"Animal?" I nervously asked. "There are no big animals in these islands. They don't grow big animals."

"How do you know?" the grocer queried.

"Never heard of them."

"That's it, then," he cried with delight. "It's some prehistoric animal."

Greatheart was in his element. "Some vast creature that the world thinks extinct, surviving here, after millions of years, on this unexplored island. And we shall discover it! What luck!"

I laughed outright, and paused in the middle of my laugh. Here, in the silence of the jungle, surrounded by the dim twilight of the matted forest, inhabited by I knew not what strange life, it frightened me to hear the sound of my foolish, half-hysterical laughter. I was glad, then, that I was not alone. In such a weird environment even a mad grocer was something to buttress my fears against.

"Well, an elephant," he hazarded, coming reluctantly back from the prehistoric ages.

"Elephants don't live in this part of the

world," I assured him. "Besides, on a little island like this, there would be no room for a herd, and elephants always live in herds."

"Modern elephants may; but what do we know about prehistoric ones? Anyhow, what made this track?"

I could not tell him. So, without further talk, we went on again.

It was not an easy matter to follow the path. Sometimes we lost it altogether, and had to halt and retrace our steps. At last we came out on the edge of the stream, or it might have been another stream, perhaps a couple of miles from the beach. We continued along this until the stream diminished to a trickling rill. Then the track led us up a steep gully, from the ridge at the top of which we had a view of the big peak. And on the top of the ridge we found the going much easier on account of a slight thinning of the forest.

It took us several hours' climbing before we reached the shoulder that pointed the way for the last climb to the summit. During our journey a tropical shower had drenched us; our sodden clothing steamed from the heat of our bodies; yet that last few hundred feet of climbing was the spur our exhaustion needed. As we reached the top we flung ourselves, utterly tired out, on the ground. Then, having

regained our breath we stood stiffly up and looked round. To our surprise the summit, save for one big tree, afforded us a clear view in every direction.

The first thing we satisfied ourselves about was the fact that we were on a small island. We could see the whole sweep of the coast, except to the west, where other peaks and ridges, as high as the summit on which we stood, shut out our view of the coastline. And far to the north we faintly made out the loom of other land. That lifted our spirits. A way of escape, by means of the raft, lay open to us. On all the other sides of the island there was nothing but the vast circle of the horizon of the ocean.

And, far away, near the coast at the other end of the island, we saw, above the blue haze of the distance, the blur of smoke!

"That's where she lives!" Greatheart cried.

"And that's where the brass band hides," I added.

"Yes, the brass band. The smoke is above the place near where we heard it playing. See that ridge? That's the earthquake cliff I told you about. The bandsmen are living in that depression behind it, on the shore. And she's with them!"

I followed his unsteadily pointing finger. The sharp rise of the land prevented us seeing any

signs of habitation. Yet there could not be any doubt about the reality of the smoke.

"We'll follow this track. It was made by the bandsmen and leads straight to her," the grocer said.

But I could see that it would take at least a day to reach that smoke from where we stood; and the state of our provisions necessitated caution. Indeed, the easier way, provided there was an opening through the forest, was to return to camp and set off from there. Or, failing that, we might manage to navigate the raft round the coast and surprise the mysterious inhabitants by coming by sea. But the height, the thin clarity of the air, the pricking spur of curiosity and the infection of Greatheart's enthusiasm so wrought on me, keying me up to his romantic pitch, that I was ready, eager, to follow him if he had pointed to the moon.

We turned to search for the track that must lead past the peak down to the inland lowlands, which we observed with surprise were not completely swathed in forest. Here and there we made out large spaces of treeless ground, alternating with expanses of open, park-like country.

And, as we made our way across the level space of the summit, I found the flagpole. It was lying on the ground—a ship's spar, tall and



yellow. And attached to it was a tattered Australian flag.

But why was it on the ground? Its base had been roughly hacked through, and close to it we saw the stump, still firmly planted in the ground.

"Cut down?" I cried. "Why?"

We stared gloomily at each other. Why, if people had erected this signal of distress, had they so hurriedly cut it down? And, again, how had they carried so heavy a piece of timber to such a height along that difficult track?

"All I can make out of it," the grocer said at length, "is that there's been a party of people shipwrecked on the island."

"The brass band?" I suggested.

"Yes. And they naturally wanted to get off. So they selected this peak, and carried that pole up here—though how, beats me—to signal to any passing ship. And look! They had even built up a big bonfire ready to signal with at night. But they never set it afire. Why? Because no ships passed? No. Because they suddenly changed their minds. Brass bands are like that, perhaps. But something occurred to make them anxious not to be rescued. They decided to stay here."

"To practise 'Lohengrin'?" I inanely suggested.



"Perhaps," he seriously agreed. "Anyhow, they'd some reason for not wanting to go back to civilisation."

"I can't understand that," I protested. "No sane person would want to live all his life in this desolate spot."

Greatheart looked away over the wide expanse of forest and park-land for a long minute before answering me. "I can," he said at last, almost as if to himself. "There's a fascination about this island that is working on me. Haven't you sometimes felt since we came here that there is something wrong about civilisation? There must be, if it keeps a man a grocer all his life."

"No," I said curtly. I had no patience with his romantic vagaries. And I had been examining the chopped off stump. "It's quite recently they felled the flag post. Since we arrived?"

"Because of our arrival," Greatheart answered serenely. "They are satisfied with this island. They don't want intruders. We are the intruders."

"But," I objected, "if we're never rescued, we'll still be intruders."

"Possibly they think we'll starve. Maybe they mean to see that we do. That girl's visit was to find out how near to starving we were. But, no; that girl wouldn't do that. She wouldn't leave the message of her handkerchief.

Perhaps the brass band is imprisoning her here and she wants our help. But if they had left that signal of distress flying and a ship had seen it, our rescuers would have found them, too. And that's the one thing they don't want."

Hardly listening to him, I had been going over the strangeness of it all. "Do you know," I said, "I think I have the explanation. It's simple. On this island there's a crowd of lunatics"—I had an inspiration from the grocer's strangely lit eyes—"or perhaps there's something in the air here that makes people who come here lunatics; or it may be a sort of asylum for the insane—like the leper stations. That woman is the leader of the harmless crew. Only a party of lunatics would have made this absurd track to the peak, and only madmen would have taken all the trouble to haul this spar up here when they could have merely chopped down this tree and made as good a flagpole of it. And only some one 'touched' would have chopped it down again. And nobody but a madwoman would have come wandering through our camp at night, peering in people's faces and leaving silly handkerchiefs about."

"No, no!" the grocer broke in fiercely. "Whatever the brass band may be, she's not a lunatic!"

I had touched his fantasy on the raw. There

was a murderous gleam in his small eyes. I felt for a moment that the island had indeed made the harmless little grocer insane. But the sudden fire died down as suddenly. He turned moodily away.

"If they're lunatics we'll find out. There must be a track down to their camp, or asylum, or whatever it is. Come on."

But half an hour's search brought us to a halt. The track, despite our careful search, did not lead anywhere, save back the toilsome way we had come. Nonplussed, we made a determined effort to break our way through the forest in the direction of the smoke, but the thorns of the creepers and the toughness of the matted undergrowth soon cooled our mad ardour. And when we gave up the attempt the sun was just sinking behind the range. We found that we had lost all sense of time. It would be necessary to camp, and the best place would be the summit. We climbed again to our look out. The bonfire was set ready for us.

But Greatheart shook his head. "They might see it—over there," he warned me.

"What's it matter if they did?" I impatiently asked.

"Ah!" That was all Greatheart's answer.

So we camped that night on the summit. And when from a dream that the strange woman was

smothering me with a lace handkerchief I awoke and sat up, I saw Greatheart's figure standing, tremendous, against the red disc of the level sun. About him—probably because at this height the dawn was cold—he had swathed the old Australian flag.

Like all of us men, his features had by now become submerged beneath a stubbly growth of beard. Podmore, I had noticed, had changed in a few days from a prosperous business man to a ripe and mellow specimen of the "dead-beat" who leans against the veranda post of a suburban "pub." Bisscop had fared better. His chubby cheeks were but faintly washed with a delicate down. He had confessed to me that he was bitterly disappointed, though Miss Liddicoat had told him she thought it became him. My own features, sicklied over with a greyish sea of beard, did not please me. But to the insignificant features of the grocer his dark, strong beard gave already a certain largeness and breadth.

And, seeing him haloed, as it were, by the red sun, I perceived a certain aspect of power in his face, an unexpected suggestion of grandeur. Wrapped in his strange garment, he looked almost heroic. About him was the blue of the heavens, and on his grocer's breast were great stars.

I spoke—I think it must have been in a whisper—and he heard me. He came striding down from his height.

“I’ve been wondering,” he began, “about my people at home. How they’re getting on, and all that. My girls—and the shop—and Woolloomooloo. It’s so far here from Woolloomooloo, isn’t it? I can’t help worrying about my girls. They’re capable enough, of course, but I think it always needs a man behind the counter, don’t you?”

He looked round vaguely at the silent spread of hills, almost as if he expected to see a customer come over the horizon; then suddenly his grocer’s cringe relaxed. He flung the flag from his shoulders.

“Look!” he cried. “The smoke’s going up again. I’ve been waiting since the dawn to see it.”

I saw, where he pointed, the hesitating blur of blue.

“They’re not early risers, at any rate,” was his sole comment. Then, with a sigh, he said, “Suppose we’ll have to be getting back.”

“But what about this?” I asked, picking up the flag. “Hadn’t we better stick it up somewhere, in case a ship comes looking for us?”

He did not answer. He was again intent on



the beckoning finger of the distant smoke. I repeated my question.

Disturbed at being brought back from his imaginings, he said carelessly, "All right. I don't think it would be any use. But stick it up if you like."

I managed to affix it securely to a bare bough of the solitary tree that crowned the summit; and with a last glance at it from me, and a last glance at the trail of smoke from him, we plunged again into the track.

And when, long after noon, we emerged again on the shore, I looked back at the distant peak and found that the flag was gone!

Greatheart did not seem greatly disturbed.

"I expected that," he serenely said. "If she cut the flag down, you may be sure she would have it down again."

It seemed to me that the grocer would have had it so. There was one mystery the more to solve. And he was in love with mystery. It flashed upon me, then, that the grocer had become an elderly Boy Scout.



## CHAPTER VI

## THE TIGER

IT was only when we reached the double-stemmed cocoa-nut palm that we realised how exhausted we were. We flung ourselves gladly down in the shade of its double crown and let the cooling sea-breeze soothe us. There were not many miles between us and the camp; but we felt it impossible, after our recent exertions, to go on without rest and food. The food was soon cooked and eaten—too soon, for we had come to the end of our provisions—and after that we stretched ourselves luxuriously on the soft sand, content to idle for an hour.

Often, as I lay there, my eyes turned towards the peak, in the foolish hope that I might see the flag again waving from the tree; but the grocer had forgotten the peak—his inquisitive gaze was upon the foliage of the palm. It occurred to me—and I smiled pityingly at the

thought—that he was probably trying to recollect where in his grocer's experience he had heard of a double-branched cocoa-nut palm before.

To my amazement my idle conjecture proved right; for suddenly he sat up.

"I've got it!" he cried. "I *knew* I had heard of it before."

He whipped the pocket-book from his coat, took from it and carefully laid aside the handkerchief and the suspender clasp, then, probing deeper, he pulled out a few papers—envelopes, pencilled memoranda on cards, bank receipts, visiting cards—the usual trivial beachcombing of a busy life, once important, now forgotten. It was with part of this collection that I had remembered lighting our first fire. He set to work to examine the debris of his past, and I recalled that when I had been about to hold one of these scraps of writing to the flame of his cigar-lighter he had excitedly snatched the light away.

"I say," I said idly, "what was there so valuable about one of those papers that you wouldn't let me burn it? Love-letter?"

"No. I'm just looking for it now. Surely I can't have lost it?" His hand shook as he fumbled among the litter. "To lose it now, when—ah! Here it is!"

Quickly, yet with reverential gentleness he

smoothed out the little scrap of folded paper and scanned the writing on it. "Yes," he breathed, with a sigh of relief, "it's quite plain."

This is what he read triumphantly out to me :

"'One tin condensed milk (double-headed cocoa-nut brand).'"

"What gibberish is that?" I irritably asked. Was the grocer reading me out an item from one of his bills?

I took the paper from his hands. Yes, it looked like a bill, or an invoice, or a list of articles—the sort of thing women produce from their hand-bags when they're trying to find a penny for their tram fare. But what woman would ever want to purchase the list of things mentioned in this paper. They were headed by the item that Greatheart had so proudly read out; but after that the list struck me as only possible should an insane person purpose buying the earth. It was the most haphazard, jumbled and madly incongruous collection of things that anybody could conceivably want all at once. Here, not alone for its curiosity, I write it down. The events that followed caused every item of that peculiar list to remain engraved on my memory till to-day. I could repeat it now, figures and all, without a mistake.

This is what the paper had written on it in a man's hand in somewhat faded ink:

- 1 tin condensed milk (double-headed cocoa-nut brand).
- 305 yards watered silk.
- 1 carpenter's T-square.
- 217 lbs. sugar (cheapest quality).
- 1 ton rock-salt.
- 1 musician's triangle.
- 1 cork-screw.
- 75 loads garden soil.
- 1 box aerated waters.
- 1 surveyor's plumb-bob.
- 1 carpenter's level.
- 35 tins soap (Sunset brand).
- 1 spade.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Greatheart eagerly asked.

"Nothing—except that this list was written by a lunatic."

"That's what I thought, at first," he admitted. "Afterwards I began to think there was something in it. But you see the mention of the double-headed cocoa-nut? I knew, as soon as I set eyes on this palm, that I had heard of the phrase before."

I dismissed the coincidence. "I've never

heard of that brand of condensed milk," I said. "Have you?"

"No," said the grocer. "And I used to do a great deal in condensed milk in Woolloomooloo. I made a lot of inquiries; but nobody in the trade had ever heard of it. But the whole list is curious, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said, studying it. "Who would want at the same time 305 yards of watered silk and 75 loads of garden soil? And what good with all that is one cork-screw and a surveyor's plumb-bob? And what should the purchaser of the garden soil want a musician's triangle for? To play tunes to the ton of rock-salt? It's just the random scribbling of some idle mind. What on earth makes you think that it has any possible value?"

"He said he wouldn't have lost it for a thousand pounds."

"He? Who?"

"The chap it belonged to. Oh, I haven't told you about him. It's the way he went on about it, and the way I came into possession of it that makes me sure it is something valuable. It was like this. One day, just about a fortnight before I left on this trip, a stranger came into the shop. He was the sort of man you do not easily forget. A Dago of some sort, an Italian or a Spaniard, I fancy. When I first looked at him

over the counter I thought he was tall; but it was something in the way he carried himself, so aggressively upright, and the way he held his head back when he looked at you, that made him appear above ordinary height. Sharp black eyes and a yellowish face with a big nose. Clean shaven. Dressed like a shopwalker, gentlemanly and dapper.

"He hovered about the shop, nervously picking up things and peering at them, as if he meant to buy the whole place out, and was determined to get full value for his money. When the only other customer left he came up to the counter and gave me a written order. I remembered afterwards that he pulled a lot of papers out of his pocket and hurriedly selected the order from them, then jammed the rest back into his pocket. It was a very big order he had written down, and a very curious one."

"This list?" I asked with surprise. "What did he want the ton of rock-salt and the cork-screw for?"

"Oh, no. Not this list at all. I only saw that later. It was a straightforward enough list of groceries that he wanted. But it was the amount of them he ordered that astonished me. It was practically a wholesale order. He could have got it much cheaper from one of the big wholesale houses; but I didn't tell him that.



No grocer would. My trade was entirely retail. It had to be in that neighbourhood—sixpence worth of this and a quarter of a pound of one-and-fivepence-halfpenny tea, you know. The profit is so much bigger on quarter pounds. But this order was in dozens—tinned meats, tinned vegetables, canned fruit, bags of oatmeal and rice and flour, cases of condensed milk—not cocoa-nut brand. I suppose I looked surprised; for, in that confidential, hurried way of his he leaned over the counter and said something about a mining party going away for a long prospecting trip in the country. He wanted a complete outfit, and left it to me to supplement it if he had overlooked anything material. I read it over carefully, and told him that I hadn't the quantity of some of the things in stock. I would have to send out for them.

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘don’t let anybody know that you’re doing it for a customer. Just say you’ve run out of stock.’ I couldn’t see the need for this secrecy; but I never object to doing a favour for a customer. It pays. ‘When do you want these delivered, and where?’ I asked him. ‘To-night,’ he replied, ‘at eleven o’clock’; and he named a back street down by the Woollomooloo wharves. Well, it was none of my business. I asked him for a deposit. He paid it, in gold—he had a big hand-bag with him—and

said he would call at six o'clock with the balance. I had to promise I would have everything ready by then. But I was not to say a word to anybody about the business. Then he went, first looking out of the door up and down the street, as if he was afraid the police were after him.

"It was hard work, as, of course, I had to do everything myself. The list of things practically cleared out my stock; and of course I got rid of some lines that were not selling—mind you, they were not inferior goods, only the public likes one brand and won't touch another. And just before six, when I was seeing to the packing of the goods on three expresses I had hired, I was called in from the back-yard by my eldest girl.

"She and her sister were, of course, intensely curious about the whole thing; but they never got a word out of me, though they were nagging at me most of the afternoon. And when I got behind the counter, there was the strange Dago chap, and my girls hovering about with their ears and eyes peeled. But I shoved them out of the shop. They didn't hear a word, I'm sure; but at tea the toast was burnt and the chops tough—at least, mine were. Women always get the last word, don't they?

"I told the man that everything was ready to go, and gave him his bill. He just glanced

at the total and paid me, in notes and gold, from that hand-bag. I was sorry then that I had not charged a halfpenny a tin more for the herrings in tomato sauce. I had been worrying over that most of the afternoon. Some of the suburban shops always charged the halfpenny extra; but quite early in my life I made it a fixed principle in my business to sell herrings in tomato sauce without the extra halfpenny. I think it was really because I was very fond of them for tea. Foolish of me not to charge a total stranger the usual price in other suburban shops. It wasn't cheating, of course. But there it was: I couldn't do it. And both my daughters said afterwards that I was a fool and ruining the business. I expect by now, with me out of the way, they're charging that odd halfpenny. Well, it won't do the business any good in the long run.

"When I had given the foreign chap his receipt he didn't go. I had to serve another customer, and when I had finished with her, he leaned over the counter again and whispered, 'You didn't happen to see a piece of paper knocking about the shop—a piece of paper with some private memorandums on it? I've lost it somewhere. Hunted everywhere for it. Thought, as a last chance, that I might have dropped it here when I was in giving you the

order.' I hadn't seen any piece of paper. I asked him if it was valuable. 'Valuable!' he said excitedly—he seemed a bundle of nerves. 'It's the most valuable thing I've ever possessed. I'd pay a thousand pounds to have it back. But, there, it isn't in the least likely I dropped it here. And I've not got too much time to find it.' I told him that I'd have a look round the shop and let him know when I delivered the goods if I had come across it. And after he had cautiously gone I explored the corners of the shop, but found nothing.

"I went down myself that night with the expresses. He met me at the place he had named, and made us drive right down to the wharf. There we drew up alongside a ship—one of those schooners fitted with an oil engine. The crew were waiting to load the stuff—I noticed they all seemed lascars or some such natives—and we all helped. The man seemed crazy to get off without the least possible delay. 'I've looked everywhere for that paper,' I told him the minute I saw him. 'Have you found it?' 'No,' he said with a kind of a snarl, 'but I said I'd go, with or without the damned paper. It's been stolen from me by those——' He pulled himself up, and gave me a suspicious glance. 'But I'll beat 'em yet. I'll be there

before them, waiting for 'em, and we'll see——' 'Why don't you advertise for it?' I asked. 'No fear,' he snorted. 'Tell 'em I lost it, eh? That would be just what they would want to know. And if they haven't got it by now, they'd pretty soon get on to it. But I'll be there before 'em, and waiting!' There was such a ferocious scowl on his foreign face that I felt sorry for them, whoever they were, if ever he met them. The last I saw of him was on the deck of the schooner, hurrying on the crew to get under way."

"But you found the paper, after all?" I suggested.

"Yes," said Greatheart, "a few days later. Why, that very afternoon, just after the man had called, my eldest daughter picked it up beside the counter. He must have dropped it there when he pulled out that heap of papers. It struck my daughter as a very funny sort of bill. She and her sister tried to puzzle it out together. Never told me about it at the time. They were offended because I had kept them out of the shop when the Dago was there; and they tried to pump me about him. I wouldn't tell them, and they sulked. The meals got most unsatisfactory. So after a few days I had to tell them. Then my girl produced the



paper. I told her she had lost a thousand pounds. They had a little respect for me after that. And I kept the paper, in case the man ever turned up again. But he never did. That's all."

I took the precious thing and scrutinised it carefully. "I can't see where its value of a thousand pounds comes in," I said.

"It's worth much more. If he was willing to give a thousand pounds for it, it would mean many thousands to him, wouldn't it?"

"Well," I said, "it's not worth a penny here on this island. Why do you hang on to it?"

"Chuck it away?" he said. "No; I'm the sort of man who hoards things. Always did. Hate to throw away anything. I suppose all grocers are like me. But what makes it valuable just now is the mention of a double-branched cocoa-nut palm in it—and here we are sitting beneath one."

He looked almost reverently up at the palm, as if it could tell him its secret; then, with a sigh of disappointment, he carefully folded up the precious paper and placed it in the security of his pocket-book.

Then we rose, our muscles stiff with our unwise relaxation after such strenuous exercise, and trudged wearily toward the camp.



Our cheerful "cooee" as soon as we rounded the last point was eagerly answered. The four, who had been gathered about the fire, came eagerly to meet us. They were too full of their news to ask us for ours.

"What's the trouble?" I called out.

"Trouble?" Podmore echoed angrily. "It isn't trouble; it's tigers!"

"Tigers!" the grocer cried, with a look that was almost triumphant. It was a delightfully adventure-filled island!

"Where?" I impatiently asked.

"Here!"

He attempted to explain; but his bottled indignation boiled over. "Nice sort of island to be shipwrecked on, I must say!" he choked. "Wild animals loose on it. Tigers! It's not safe for respectable, law-abiding people. It's not an island: it's a zoo—with all the cages open. The shipping company should have warned us. It's damnable the callous way they overlook the comfort and safety of their passengers. It shouldn't be allowed. Criminal negligence, that's what it is. I'll expose the whole thing in the papers. Serve 'em right, too—keeping wild tigers on innocent-looking islands for their passengers to be shipwrecked among. And they expect us to put up with it! They don't know *me*. I'm not going to sit

down and be crawled over by nasty smelling beasts without making a public protest. And I expect you all to back me up. What do we pay the police for if they don't remove wandering tigers? There ought to be a by-law. I'll get a question asked in Parliament about it. I'll stir up the public. Tigers! Wild tigers! It's scandalous, scandalous!"

We endured this outbreak impatiently. Podmore was in no condition to explain. It was only that the fat, perspiring man's breath gave out in a falsetto "Scandalous!" that allowed us a chance of being heard.

Greatheart snapped a curt question to Miss Rice before Podmore could wail again.

"Mr. Podmore," that lady explained, "was sleeping with Mr. Bisscop on the beach last night—we were in the hut—when he was awakened."

"By a beautiful woman with one stocking down?" the grocer broke in eagerly.

"No; by a nasty tiger."

"Alone?" Greatheart showed his disappointment.

"One was surely enough."

"I mean, wasn't there anybody with the tiger?"

"Likely anybody would go out strolling with

a tiger!" I snubbed his preposterously romantic soul.

"There's the case of the Lady of Niger," Bisscop bleakly intruded.

We stared at him, as we should have stared at a tiger. It was the only evidence the Oxford youth had ever given of a suspicion of humour. The island was doing him good. But nobody smiled, though I saw that Miss Liddicoat was digesting the remark and finding it satisfying.

"No lady?" Greatheart was loath to give up his hope. By this time he was seeing a woman in everything. "Well, how did Podmore——?"

"He woke in the night," Miss Rice continued. "He heard a soft sort of sound on the sand. He was lying on his back. He opened his eyes, and there was the beast. He says it was an enormous tiger."

"'Normous!" spluttered Podmore.

"What was it doing?" I asked.

"Looking at Mr. Podmore."

"Smelling me!" said that gentleman.

"Smelling me in the most insulting manner."

"Well, what did you do?"

"Do?" Podmore snorted. "What could I do? I didn't go to sleep prepared to meet tigers, did I? I went to sleep trusting to the implied guarantee of the shipping company that there

were no tigers on this trip. I just lay still, pretending I was dead."

"And what did the tiger do?"

"He smelled me—in a most contemptuous manner. Nobody has ever dared to smell me like that before."

"That all?" I could not avoid saying.

"All?" Podmore gasped, purple with indignation. "You just wait till you're smelled by a tiger! Luckily I didn't move. By a tremendous effort I restrained myself from hitting it on the nose. He smelled me all over, quietly. I had my eyes shut, of course. I felt his breath on my face, for, I should say, quite half an hour. It was a horribly nasty, warm sort of breath—as if his stomach was out of order—a sort of bad whisky smell, a morning smell, with lobster in it. It upset me. I couldn't help it. I sneezed."

"Yes, yes?" Greatheart and I encouraged him.

"I sneezed right in his insulting face. He jumped."

"But you're not wounded?"

"No. He jumped away. When I opened my eyes I saw him slinking away into the bush."

"That's all," Miss Rice concluded, seeing we were waiting for more.

"You dreamt it," I said at last. "Biscuits and shell-fish and cocoa-nuts are just the sort of supper that would make you dream tigers. It's a wonder you didn't dream more of 'em. I have. There aren't any wild animals on the island. What would they find to feed on?"

"That's what I wondered when I smelt his nasty breath," said Podmore. "Dream it? I didn't dream a *smell*."

"We all saw its tracks, plain, in the sand this morning," Miss Rice added. "Come here."

We followed her to the edge of the stream.

There we plainly saw the pads of some great animal, like the footprints of an enormous cat.

We stared at each other in consternation.

"We're not safe here at night," Miss Liddicoat wailed, clutching Bisscop's protecting arm.

"We've got no guns," said that youth. "And I had a beautiful little revolver under my pillow in the cabin. I always slept with it under my pillow since I left England."

"I simply refuse to allow that animal to smell me again," Podmore emphatically declared.

We all turned to Greatheart.

He had his usual inspiration. "There's the cave!"

"What cave?" the others asked; and Greatheart, in his element once more, described the place of refuge we had so opportunely found.

“We must move everything there at once,” he said. “To-night we’ll sleep in safety. The island’s getting too dangerous. First the woman, then the strange track and the flagpole cut down, then the smoke, and now the tiger! Come on!”

He was our trusted leader again, confident, alert, almost welcoming the new danger.



## CHAPTER VII

## THE WOMAN

WE paid little attention to the discovery that our raft had been smashed and rendered useless. We had too many other things to think of.

We were now settled in the cave, whither we had hastily fled at the news of Podmore's nocturnal tiger. We had removed our small store of food, and had, with some difficulty, carried our fire by means of torches to its new altar. The smoke, we discovered, found its way through some rifts, invisible to us, in the roof of the cave. And the difficulty of the approach along the narrow ledge enabled us to sleep secure from prowling beasts.

The floor was of hard dry earth. It was smooth enough to suggest that the cave had once been the habitation of human beings. This was quite conceivable, as, had there been natives on the island, they would certainly have utilised

so safe a refuge. But there was no sign of bones, or of the remains of a fire. If it had been the home of human beings that must have been in the long ago.

The water that Greatheart had heard dripping in the interior of the cave came from a hole in the rocky wall, falling thence into a natural basin of stone, whence it emerged as a tiny rivulet to disappear further on again into the rock. The water, doubtless spring water, was delightful to drink; and the natural basin provided us with a plentiful supply.

It was on the day following our removal that Greatheart suggested bringing the raft nearer to our new camp. As the sea was quite calm, it would be possible to launch the raft and navigate it along the coast by poling it through the shallow water. Bisscop and I volunteered for the work. After our hod-carriers' job this promised something like relaxation.

We found the raft where we had left it, above the reach of the highest tide, moored securely to the trunk of a small tree. But it was no longer seaworthy. It had been deliberately smashed up. The big drums that, filled with air, had given the raft its buoyancy, had been hacked by some sharp and heavy instrument. One glance told us that the raft would never float again.

We hurried back to the cave with our bad news. The grocer did not seem over-surprised.

"You look," I said indignantly, "as if you expected this."

"I did," he replied. "At least, I did not think they'd break up the raft; but I'm convinced that whoever is on the island does not intend us to leave it. The cutting down of the flagpole was warning enough. But I should have looked after the raft."

"Well," said Bisscop gloomily, "that settles the question of us trying to get off to the mainland, if there is a mainland."

"Couldn't we build another raft?" Miss Rice suggested.

"With one little tomahawk?" Greatheart answered.

"Why not?" Miss Rice urged. "You're so clever with the tomahawk."

In her bright little eyes there dwelt an adoration as she turned to him. She was already, with that strange weakness of the most sensible of women, deifying a mere human being simply because he was a male. But there was no worship in Podmore's glance.

"You're so clever with a tomahawk," he sneered, "that you could even have smashed the raft up yourself."

His sneer struck us like a blow. I confess

I felt uneasy. We all turned to Greatheart. He laughed.

“Why to goodness should I do that?”

“Why?” Podmore was ready for him. “Because you’re not playing fair. Because you don’t mean to let us leave the island. Because you’re in love with some woman on the island, and you’re going to stay here and find the treasure of the galleon for yourself—and her.”

Blankly we looked at each other, avoiding the gaze of our leader. Had this clumsy fat man found the clue to the growing mysteries of the island? Was Greatheart a traitor—in league with our unseen enemies? To me, perhaps more than to the others, his conduct looked suspicious. The midnight visit of the woman to the camp, her apparent recognition of the grocer, her dropped handkerchief—all these hitherto inexplicable occurrences seemed to add weight to Podmore’s accusation. Had Greatheart, unsuspected by us, been meeting that woman and her friends in the bush? Had he, on that exploring trip, deliberately hoodwinked me? Had he been in touch all the time with the mysterious inhabitants of the island? Was he, in his infatuation for that girl—of which I had had ample proof—plotting against us?

We waited for the grocer’s defence. He said nothing.

It was Miss Rice's reedy voice that ended the embarrassing pause. "For shame!" she cried, turning on the fat man. "After all Mr. Greatheart has done for us, after his saving our lives! Mr. Greatheart"—she left Podmore withered by her scorn, and turned to pour her balm on the grocer's wounded soul—"Mr. Greatheart, I—we trust you. Do not trouble to answer Mr. Podmore. We believe in you. So there!"

The last two words, the most convincing in a woman's vocabulary, should have left Podmore slain. He merely grinned his contempt of femininity. And, flushed with victory, and perhaps a softer feeling, the little lady beamed on the little grocer.

"If you really think," Greatheart began with a gravity that had, to me, something almost of sublimity in it, "that I've been deceiving you, there is only one thing for a man to do. I'll go away and camp by myself. In this cave you'd be quite safe—safe," he showed his bitterness, "even from me."

He had been sorely wounded. As a grocer he had, of course, been all his life suspicious, professionally suspicious of everybody. But he had so easily sloughed off his grocerdom in this freer environment that his across-the-counter suspicions of his fellow-men had been lulled



asleep. He had accepted us as human beings, not as customers whom the ethics of grocerism compelled him to cheat; and it doubtless came as a shock, abrading his tender vanity, to learn that he could still be suspected of not putting enough sugar in his sand. Podmore's brusque accusation, and our momentary acceptance of it, had pushed him rudely back to Woolloomooloo. And he had quite forgotten Woolloomooloo.

"No, no!" Miss Rice exclaimed, lifting her thin, bird-like hand impulsively, almost protectingly, to his shoulder. "Stay with us! What could we do without you?"

She had hit the right note. We knew ourselves a crew of incompetents, and, lacking his guidance, our future frightened us. Podmore contented himself with a grunt that implied that he washed his blistered hands of us, recognising the futility of protest against our hero-worship. Miss Liddicoat, backed up by Bisscop and myself, implored him to stay.

That was the first time I had ever seen a grocer weep. The tears trembled from his eyes, but he pulled himself up, sniffed—he had no handkerchief—and brightened.

"Then," he answered, "it's up to me to settle the mystery of the island right away. Tomorrow at dawn I'll start out for that place where I saw the smoke. And I won't come back



till I've found out everything. If I'm not back here in three days you'll know that I've failed, that they've been too much for me. Keep to the cave, and don't show yourselves if anybody comes, unless it is the rescue ship. No," he added, as I made to speak, "I'll go alone! If there's any danger—I don't say there is—it would not be fair to the ladies for two of us men to run any risks."

It struck me then that the little man, in his emotion, was posing. I did not think, terrifying as the advent of the tiger seemed, coming as it did on top of our other disconcerting discoveries, that we were in any immediate danger. Still, we had the refuge of the cave, with a supply of provisions for possibly a fortnight, while he purposed finding the lair of that tiger—and of what other terrors beside? No; I did not altogether blame him. The island, which had seemed so idyllic, had suddenly become peopled with menace. I know I should not have proposed such an adventure alone. And if he were posing, what grocer in history had ever before been so tempted to pose?

. . . . .

That night the brightness of the moon drew us, after our dinner, out to the platform at the

mouth of the cave. The cove was at rest; the sea was as smooth as the sand; the grove of cocoa-nut palms, sentinelled by the double-branched one, had ceased its deep murmur of tremulous fronds; the forest above us brooded in a hush of silence beneath the calm benignity of a passionless faint blue sky.

We were disposed to silence, too. The day's work had left us happily and contentedly tired. I recalled other moonlit nights in Sydney, when just at this hour I would be clanging in the crowded tram down dusty, stifling streets to my night-long work at the heated office. And I rejoiced; for the work we had to do in this new world was inspiring work, labour that lifted the heart with the thrill of health and set strong currents of fire a-running in the veins. I had never before felt so physically fit.

I think, too, the spring in my muscles, the youth in my heart, were felt by all the others. Greatheart was transformed. His small, wiry frame had proved itself invulnerable to fatigue. His skin glowed with vitality. He was alive. Bisscop looked like an athlete new come from his bath and a vigorous towelling. Podmore had lost the outer strata of his fat. He had that evening climbed the path up the cliff with the agility and zest of a bird-nesting schoolboy. He had more than once confessed to me that

he had never known before the beautiful meaning of an appetite.

Miss Liddicoat, who was just now with Bisscop "washing up" the remains of our meal within the cave, had lost that provocative paleness that I suspect she had hitherto assiduously cultivated. She was now quite ordinary looking and correspondingly healthy. Her hands, which had once dawdled listlessly and doubtless gracefully over the piano keys, were now the strong red hands of a washerwoman. And Bisscop seemed to like to touch them. Miss Rice had almost renewed her forgotten youth under the spur of her new duties. In her ulster she looked at times jaunty. One morning I had accidentally come upon the two women dancing together after their bathe by the river bank.

Podmore and I were leaning against the cliff, while Miss Rice and the grocer were sitting at the edge of the precipice, swinging their shameless legs over space. Bisscop and Jean Liddicoat, who should have by this time finished their "washing up," still lingered within the darkness of the cave.

"If that young man hasn't kissed that girl, I'll be surprised," Miss Rice said softly, with a reminiscent, or perhaps a merely wistful, sigh.

"It's such a night for love-making, isn't it, Mr. Greatheart?"

I thought she leant nearer to the grocer. He said nothing.

"It's just lovely," she murmured on, "to see a love-affair developing, isn't it? They're so perfectly matched. I remember——"

Perhaps affrighted by the silence, she broke off at the memory. I wondered vaguely what it was. Some sentimental passage in her own obscure youth? Some moonlit night that might have meant happiness to her, but didn't? Some hope builded only on the promptings of a foolish young heart that dissolved into fantasy at a touch of common sense? Some wasted dream, vaguely spacious, that only on moonlit nights she could permit her shy soul to disinter, buried beneath the matter-of-fact clods of life? I do not know. Her secret was held secure, shut in beneath her boarding-house soul.

"I wonder," she went on, to cover the awkward pause, "what memory this moonlit night reveals for you, Mr. Greatheart?"

The grocer started, rudely stirred from his reverie.

"I was just thinking," he said, slowly speaking out his thoughts, "of another night as bright as this. I watched all through that night when my wife's first baby was being born. And now

my wife's dead, and the girl's grown up and running the shop. And it was on another moonlight night that my wife died. I thought, the morning after, that I had died, too. And now I know," he perceptibly brightened, "that till I came here I had never lived. All that, what seemed so important, was nothing but a dream—a bad dream. And how poor Jane would have enjoyed this! You know, all my life in Woolloomooloo I never stopped to think what I was doing with my life, or, rather, what my life was doing with me. For it isn't we who make any impression on life: it's life who hammers us. Funny, isn't it. There's been so much life on the globe—all those dead and gone civilisations. Egypt, you know." Evidently his knowledge of ancient history was meagre. "There must have been millions and millions of people exactly like us; and what good were they, anyhow? What did they do with their rotten useless little lives? A few silly pyramids that are no use to anyone except as building material. And think of all the grocers there have been in the world! There were grocers in — in Babylon, and, oh yes, grocers in Greece. And they kept their little shops and married and had children and died and left the business to their children, who married and died, too. And what use was all



this mob of grocers? What did they do for the world?"

"They made money," Podmore vouchsafed.

"But that's so easy," said Greatheart. "Everybody makes money, more or less. Everybody makes more than his actual worth at the moment he comes into the world. At least, till he dies of starvation. No; what I mean is, what use did we make of living? I know now I made none."

"There's your shop in Woolloomooloo," I urged.

"That's no use to me. I was of use to it. I made it; but it didn't make me. Once I started it, from that moment I became its slave. And, but for this shipwreck, I'd be its slave yet. The best part of my life gone in chains! But I'm free of it now. I'm going to *be*!"

"But you liked your job," I objected.

"I had to. I never had any choice: it was either that, or something equally dull—or starving. I confess I was attracted by the grocery business, but there wasn't anything more attractive within my reach. If only I had been shipwrecked when I was a boy! And, really, do any of us like our jobs?"

"Well, do any of us?"

"Civilisation," the grocer ran on. "All it's done for us is to chain us down to jobs that we



dislike the least. There's no variety in our lives. All the delightful doors are shut in our faces. Grocers' shops, hundreds of them in Sydney, all competing against the others, all just making a little bit of profit. Several in one street, almost next door to each other. There were two other grocery shops just round the corner from Greatheart's Grocery Store. Fighting against each other just to supply Sydney with groceries. All of us chained up to our counters, scheming how to beat the others. And one big concern with a branch in every suburb could have done it twice as efficiently and with a doubled profit."

"Socialism!" The word came inevitably from Podmore.

"Yes, in the grocery business I'm a Socialist. Private grocers' shops are excrescences. Clumsily useful, perhaps; but what a waste in efficiency. And that's all that civilisation has done with groceries. It's just gone on multiplying grocers' shops, with more grocers and their families tied to them. People who might have been men and women."

The girl came from the cave, flushed, angered. Bisscop sheepishly followed. Either he had tried to kiss her, and bungled it, or she had given him his chance and he had not tried to kiss her. Women regard both as insults.

She moved over to the edge of the cliff, sat on the other side of Greatheart and swung her legs in unison. Bisscop sank down beside Podmore and me.

It seemed to me that Miss Liddicoat looked up at the grocer on one side as Miss Rice did on the other. Evidently Bisscop's love affair was not running smoothly. There was a grocer in the field.

At last he stood up ; and it seemed to me, and doubtless to the adoring eyes of the women, that he was actually taller. Perhaps he was. For he had completely lost the grocer's stoop—the immemorial cringe of grocers, with flat hands spread wide on the counter and the insinuatingly humble “And the next thing, madam?”

As he surveyed his domain, a prehistoric man with his adoring clan behind him, there came from the night the far-reverberating roar of a wild animal.

“The tiger!” Podmore groaned, shivering.

I did not notice, as I leapt to my feet, which of the two women was the first to clutch Greatheart. As Greatheart was on his feet, and the women were sitting, they merely clutched his knees. The result was that he sat abruptly down.

He rose as swiftly as he had fallen, and,

pulling the women up with an impartial hand to each, and holding them as they swayed, he faced the forest, his mind made up.

"I'm going now," he announced. "This minute."

The women gasped, huddled against him. "You wouldn't leave us now?" one of them moaned.

He shook them off. "That tiger can't be half a mile away."

He found us, the men, at his side.

"What can you do?" I asked.

"Find that tiger."

"But you haven't got a weapon."

This obvious fact had not struck him.

"And we're quite safe here," I urged.

The tiger answered me. It seemed to me nearer.

"I must go—that's all," he muttered.

"Then we'll all go," Bisscop politely said. "All except the women. Podmore can stay and look after them."

"No," Miss Rice broke in, exalted. "If Mr. Greatheart goes, I'll go."

Miss Liddicoat was not to be left. And she was not going to leave Miss Rice with the grocer.

"And I'm coming, too," said Podmore, "to

see that you are not up to any more of your tricks."

Greatheart, with a gesture that was either magnificent or theatrical—I'm not sure even now which—swung round on him. "If you can think that of me," he bitterly said, "come. We'll all go together."

Of course, it was mere foolishness thus to risk the lives of all in the darkness of the forest, without weapons and with no knowledge of what beside the tiger might be waiting for us there. But we were all strung up with excitement. The tension had to be snapped by immediate action. To remain cooped up in the cave, with that challenging mystery at our door, was unthinkable, even to the women.

Hastily we set out, each of us armed with as thick a stick as we could find. We climbed down the cliff and made our way across the sand towards the bluff that was the further horn of the cove. It was from the bush near that point that the roaring of the animal, even more menacing now, plainly came. As we reached the base of the bluff the animal's voice sounded almost on top of us.

I noticed Podmore glance anxiously back—I noticed him because I had also glanced anxiously back—but Bisscop, who with him brought up the rear, had him by the arm.

"You couldn't run very far or very fast, anyhow," he cruelly said to the fat man. "Safer to keep with us."

The women, who occupied the centre of our forlorn hope, marched bravely on, though in the moonlight their faces were whiter than their nightdresses.

"I remember once," said Miss Rice desperately, "I had to turn out a drunken boarder in the middle of the night. He was breaking up my best bedroom suite. I only had a poker."

We climbed the tiny bluff, Greatheart leading, I close behind him. The forest, which had looked to us from the beach to be an impassable jungle, thinned unexpectedly out, once we had penetrated its seaward fringe, to a thinly timbered stretch of rocky country, sparsely carpeted with a rank grass. Even in the moonlight it was comparatively easy to thread our way through it.

"This is the way the girl came and went that night she visited the camp," the grocer whispered to me. "We missed the track. I bet it leads straight back to where we saw the smoke. Lucky that tiger gave the show away like this. They can't escape us now."

By now the roaring had ceased. Perhaps the beast had scented our approach, and was waiting behind one of those black blobs of shadow that seemed in the moonlight almost solid. We



went cautiously on, I, at least, reluctantly. The others had closed in on us, evidently uneasy.

We panted up a little ridge and instinctively paused, cowering down, at the top. There, in the moonlight, we stared amazed at a strange picture.

The forest had thinned away to an open glade, in the cup of which the moonlight lay like a lake of silver. And into this arena, passing slowly from the shadows at its edge, came a woman and a tiger.

She was the woman whom I had seen bending over Greatheart, the woman whose love-token the grocer still held sacred in his pocket-book. And her slim arm was thrown confidently and caressingly over the glossy shoulder of a gigantic tiger, her fingers lovingly buried in its beautiful fur.

"Look!" Miss Rice whispered, awestruck. "She's stroking its fur backwards, as you stroke a cat! And, goodness gracious me, I do believe it's purring!"

Apparently absolutely unconscious of our intrusion, the incongruous pair strolled across the open space. The girl was dressed in that strangely glittering grey costume that I had seen before. In the moonlight she seemed sheathed in silver mail. It looked to me like some picture of pagan Greece—the goddess and the



fawning beast. And yet there was a disconcerting modernity about her figure. I had the sudden conviction that she wore a corset beneath that mediæval mail. And, when you come to think of it, if suspenders, why not stays?

We could do nothing but stare as at a limelited scene in a drama. So even was the pace of the strange pair, so oblivious of any observers they contentedly seemed, that they might have been a lady and her pet dog going for an evening stroll. And the lithe, swinging walk of the tiger was no more lithe and swinging than that of the girl.

Suddenly their almost divine detachment was rudely broken. The tiger paused with a lifted paw, raised its regal head and gazed fixedly straight at us. It had found our scent.

The girl as instantaneously stopped. It almost seemed as if her lifted foot, too, hung waiting in the air. She stared at the rising ground behind which we were concealed. I saw her lips move—some quietening murmur to the tiger.

In time, too. For the great beast had thrown back its head to give challenging voice to its suspicions. The girl smartly clouted it across the open mouth. It snarled, reared, and, at her uplifted, imperious arm, flopped heavily down,

like a cat that had been whipped. Then obviously it sulked.

So she stood, mechanically soothing the tiger's hurt feelings with a fondly caressing hand, and stared, it seemed expectantly, in our direction.

Silently Greatheart rose from his crouching position, stepped from the shadow of the trees, stood one moment clear and significant on the ridge, and, as if drawn by an invisible filament, moved slowly, mechanically down into the moonlight-flooded arena.

At the sight of him the tiger stiffened. So brilliant was the moonlight, so vividly it etched the two figures against the background that I could see the contracting muscles furrow and ripple his thick fur. But the girl's sensitive fingers had warned her. She flung at him, without wrenching her gaze from Greatheart's figure, one sharply hissed command, and the tiger became again a loose bundle of tawny beauty. It cringed, sulkily fawning, relaxed, afraid.

And, erect, expectant, with her hand firmly buried in the tiger's skin, the girl awaited regally the arrival of her mate.

He passed steadily, as in a dream, straight across the glade, drawn by that arrogant poise

of the waiting woman. A queen was summoning her barbarian slave.

Then, with the uneasy tiger between them, they looked straightly at each other, a long, drinking gaze. Perhaps they spoke—we were too far away to hear—perhaps their transfixed look was question and answer.

Then, turning, as if with reluctant sighs, from their gaze, they paced side by side, the tiger between them; and across the great forgotten beast's rippling back they scanned each other with sidelong glances. So, as we watched, the three passed sedately across the arena and were received by the shadows of the forest.

We breathed, silent, waiting for the issue of their rencontre. It seemed to us the prelude to something momentous. What secret was Greatheart now learning, and when would he return to us with it? But the glade remained empty. No grocer desecrated its silent, silver beauty.

"I thought so," Podmore at last found voice. "The man is in league with the others. That woman is their leader. It's the last we'll ever see of him. And a good riddance."

I could not find words, nor had I the desire, to defend the grocer. He had deserted us, probably—I excused him—against his grocer's will, lured from his fellow-kind by the barbaric

wonder of woman. The syrens still called, even to grocers. The odd thought came to me that it was a good job that Jane, his wife, was dead. Against the witchery of that silver woman, Jane, however estimable, would have had no chance.

Then I grew conscious of a sound behind me—a sound my ears, but not my brain, had taken cognisance of for some minutes past—it was the helpless, hopeless sobbing of Miss Rice.

“But she’s beautiful!” the little boarding-house keeper found voice at last to wail. “Beautiful!”

“And she’s got him!” the voice of the other woman broke savagely in, “stolen him from—from us!”

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE SCHOONER

IT was a depressed company that climbed the cliff and filed along the narrow path to the cave. Even Podmore's vindictive elation, during that walk from the scene of Greatheart's defection, had time to simmer down. It is one thing to be able to say "I told you so," and another to feel like saying it. In truth he was now feeling like the rest of us, strangely lost and leaderless. I do not doubt that if Greatheart had not come with us on the raft we should have got on somehow; but we had so got into the way of letting him decide things, of depending on his resource, that, missing him, we felt like a crop of incubator chickens.

The underlying grievance was not his desertion of us, but that he had taken his talent for organisation, his delight in contriving, his large optimism and his inexhaustible resource over to the enemy. With such an ally, those

mysterious beings of the island, we felt, deliberately menaced our lives.

Miss Rice gave voice to the dread in our craven hearts. "If that creature told him to exterminate us," she said drearily, "he'd do it. He'd murder the whole boiling of us for one of her wicked smiles. Oh, I know that sort of woman. I had one for a week in my boarding-house. Every other woman in the place insisted on her leaving; and my best boarder, a nice old gentleman I had had for eighteen months, left with her. And I did think Mr. Greatheart rather liked"—she hesitated before she supplied the non-committal plural—"us."

"Well," Bisscop cheerily interposed, "we needn't be afraid of that tiger any more. It's as tame as a Persian kitten. No wonder it ran away when Podmore sneezed. If Podmore had only sneezed to-night, we would have seen the last of the beast and the girl. Did you see the way it cuddled up to her hand when she stroked its fur?"

"Yes," Podmore indignantly replied, "and I saw the way it snarled when the grocer appeared. It was just touch and go with him, as it was nearly the end of me."

"It's the end, anyhow," Miss Rice said sadly.

"He's dead to *us*," Miss Liddicoat added.



"But what's a tiger, tame or not, doing out strolling with her?" I asked.

"And what's she doing on our island?" Miss Liddicoat snapped.

"I think," Miss Rice said deliberately, "that an uninhabited island is the best place for that sort of woman. If I had my way those lithe, supple, cat-like women would all be shut up in a sort of leper-station. I wouldn't have her as a boarder, not if she paid twice over."

"Well," Bisscop said, "the grocer chap knows all about it now."

"I wonder," said Miss Liddicoat, "where she got her extraordinary clothes?"

"Reminds a chap of the front row in the ballet," Bisscop flung his item in.

"How any decent woman, even on an uninhabited island, could appear in public in those things——!" Miss Rice's bitter contempt overpowered her utterance.

"Come to think of it," I said soothingly, "the costumes we're all wearing now aren't exactly the sort of things that decent people wear."

"You know well enough," Miss Liddicoat severely called me down, "they're the only ones we've got."

"Perhaps hers are the only ones *she's* got."

"Nonsense!" Miss Rice cried. "Sooner

than wear those things—indecent I call them—I'd go naked."

Bisscop smothered a chuckle.

"She must have other clothes," Miss Liddicoat came to her sister's rescue, "with the brass band and the other people. No. How any decent woman——"

"That's it," said Miss Rice eagerly. "That's what she is."

Which remark seemed soothingly satisfactory to both women.

"All I can say is," Miss Rice remarked with contemplative gloom, "and say it I do, and with sorrow. I would never—no, never—have expected such conduct from our Mr. Greatheart. I thought I knew men; I've seen every sort in my house; but now I see you must be shipwrecked with them."

There was a gloomy silence.

It was broke by Miss Rice's sharp wail. "I wonder what he's doing now?"

"Stroking the tiger," said a voice. It was Bisscop's.

Now I understood why he, at least, was not too seriously concerned at the grocer's defection. With his competition out of the way Miss Liddicoat might prove more kind.

And then Miss Rice spoke with cold vindic-

tiveness. "I would rather the tiger tore him limb from limb than that that woman got him."

And the other woman, after one astonished glance of admiration at the boldness of her sex, murmured her agreement.

"I say," said Bisscop, "ever read that story, by that writer chap named Stockton, 'The Lady or the Tiger,' I think he called it? I often wondered who got the fellow in the end—the lady or the tiger—now I know."

Miss Rice, in her unmitigable gloom, had no retort for him. Miss Liddicoat scornfully rose and without a "good night" sailed into the cave.

There was nothing further to say or do. So, one after the other, they slipped into the cave to sleep. I remained. I wanted to think things out. I had to admit that the night's adventure, instead of clearing up the mystery, only tangled matters more inextricably. What was it that the woman and her companions, human and animal, were so anxious to keep hidden, as they themselves had kept hidden? The idea of a concealed treasure to which the woman and the others had first claim, and the existence of which they would naturally desire to keep secret, impressed itself strongly on my mind. But why these strange tactics? Was the woman the agent of a band of adven-

turers, and her purpose the luring of us—as possible rivals for the gold—to destruction? She had begun with Greatheart. Which of us was to be the next? Well, we had been fully warned by this night's adventure.

I was just considering how I might block up the mouth of the cave, so that we could sleep secure from any intrusion, when I wheeled round at a sound. It was the soft pad of naked feet coming along the cliff path.

I faced the intruder, my back against a big rock, emboldened by the knowledge that with such advantageous foothold it would be easy to hurl any man or beast off the narrow track.

And then I recognised the grocer.

"It's you, is it?" I made the immemorial foolish remark.

"Yes, it's me," said Greatheart in a new, meek voice.

It struck me then that he had the humble, slinking, apologetic attitude of the husband who has been "making a night of it" at the Lodge meeting, and is not quite satisfied in his blurred mind whether his dream that he had a wife at home might not turn out to be miserably true.

His first words, too, confirmed the impression.

"They're asleep—the ladies?" he whispered, lifting a cautious thumb towards the cave.

"Long ago," I assured him. "And the men too."

He sighed his obvious relief—it was almost gratitude—and sank comfortably down on the rocky platform.

"Didn't want disturb ladies," he said thickly. "Gone bye-bye, poor dears. Thatsh right."

For a moment I suspected alcohol; but a closer inspection showed me that I had maligned my fellow-man. His thick utterance was the result merely of the dazed stupor in which his mind seemed sunk.

"Well," I said at last, "what happened?"

"Eh?" he ejaculated, startled.

Brusquely I rained my questions on his huddled form. "Who is she? What's she doing here? What does she want?"

"I don't know," he answered slowly and with an effort.

"Don't know? You *must* know. The woman——"

"Ah!" the grocer seized on that. "The woman!"

It seemed to him to explain everything. He was surprised to find me still impatiently waiting.

"You're sure they're all asleep?" he muttered.

"Sound."



Frowning, he tried to put his tangled thoughts in order. "It's—it's so hard to explain."

I told him to take his time. He did. "Didn't she tell you anything about herself?" I had at last to ask.

"Yes, yes, of course," he assented eagerly.

"What *did* she say?"

He puzzled a bit, then wearily, "I—don't—remember."

Exasperated, I prodded that curiously shrunken and abjectly huddled form with eager questions. He let them fall, without defence, upon his bent head.

At last he spoke. "Wonderful eyes!" he murmured. "I never saw such eyes."

"Look here, Greatheart," I said, adopting the tone that a doctor uses to an hysterical girl. "You'll just tell me plainly and at once what took place from the moment you met that woman."

His dog-like eyes were raised to me at the new brusqueness of my tone. "I'll try," he said humbly, a scolded schoolboy.

"What did she say when you stepped up to her?" I prompted.

"I—I think she just looked at me, a long, long look. Such eyes!"

"But surely you said something, introduced yourself, or said, 'Good evening'?"



"No; I don't think so. You see," he confidently explained, "there wasn't any need. We understood."

"Understood what?"

"Each other. She was there and I was there. That didn't need any explanation. We just stood and looked."

"You said that before. But what about the tiger?"

"The tiger?" Evidently the word stirred some recollection. "There *was* a tiger, wasn't there? I kind of remember seeing a tiger. Did you see one, too? Then there *must* have been a tiger. But——" He worried over it. "I forget what became of it. You see, we had so much to say to each other. I suppose the tiger got bored and went away for a stroll, or lay down for a sleep." He tried again to recall the fate of the animal. It had passed out of recollection. He gave it up, as a matter of ephemeral importance. "We must have mislaid that tiger somewhere. But it really didn't matter. We had each other. We just strolled on through the open country in the moonlight, and at last we sat down."

"Why did you sit down?" I asked, determined to keep him to his story.

"Because," he said, with a slight impatience, "we saw the chairs."

"Chairs? In the forest?"

"Yes," he said brightly. "Easy chairs—those wide chairs made of cane, you know. Two easy chairs."

No; he was not fooling me. I tested him; but he always came back simply, to those two easy chairs set ready for them in the jungle. No; there was no hut nor camp there, just the two comfortable easy chairs under a big tree. I had to concede him the chairs.

"What did you two talk about?" I asked.

"What do a man and a woman talk about in the moonlight?" he murmured, overcome by my stupidity. "A woman and a man—a woman with wonderful moonlight eyes——"

"Surely you asked her who she was and what she was doing here?"

"No. It wasn't necessary, don't you understand? She was there. I touched her. She was real. That was enough. We just talked. I think I must have told her about my dead wife, poor Jane."

"And then?"

"Then," he said simply, "I kissed her."

"From your easy chair?"

"No. I suppose I must have got up and stooped down to her."

"And what did she do?"

"She kissed me, of course."

"Well?"

"Then I came home."

"But why?"

"All of a sudden I seemed to remember the cave, and all of you waiting for me. I had forgotten everything. Her eyes were so wonderful—sleeping eyes, with shadowy dreams in them. But after she had kissed me—I did not know women could kiss like that, Jane never did—she stood away from me and kept her eyes down, sideways. And I seemed to wake up. I remembered the cave. I told her I had to go home. It was very late to be out, and you would be expecting me. She wouldn't believe I meant it at first. She clung to me, so close she seemed part of me, like—like the colours in an opal. I pushed her away—it was like pushing away my own shadow. She wasn't half as strong as I had thought. She was soft. Her arms seemed fragile. They fell down. I made her sit down in the easy chair. She huddled into it, and only looked at me in a puzzled, frightened way. Then I gave her back her handkerchief and the suspender thing. They were hers, you know, and she might have been uncomfortable without them. She just let them lie in her lap, with her hands. And all the while I felt how careless I had been leaving you alone so long. Anything might

have happened to you. So I went, and left her lying in the chair, in the forest, under the setting moon. She did not call me back. She kept her frightened eyes on me all the time. I felt them even when I turned my back."

He waited a moment, as if to taste again the savour of that farewell glance. When he went on it was with a brisker note.

"I don't know how I found my way back to the beach. The moon soon set. I think it was just by chance that I came out on to the shore. Podmore was right. I shouldn't have gone, neglecting you. I am responsible for you. But she kissed me. I felt it right down to my heels."

He relapsed into a Buddhist contemplation of that kiss.

I shook him. He looked up, sulkily. I ordered him to go to bed. He rose like a hypnotised man and slunk inside the cave, stepping, it seemed to me, stealthily so as not to wake the others.

I sat there, outside in the starlit darkness, and considered this new grocer. So, after all, he had been "making a night of it." The grocer had fallen in love, and fallen with a flop. Love had snared him; he was lost, eternally forgone. The alert little man had got his second calf-love, and his lady was dressed like

a ballet girl and roved a lonely island with a tame tiger.

And yet, drowned fatally in the shadows of the strange woman's eyes, he had grasped his tiny straw of sanity. He had steeled his pliant soul, straightened himself and broken away. He had desperately pushed those clinging arms aside and taken the straight path back to respectability and the suburbs. Stumbling and dazed and torn with his wounds he had come back to us; at least, he had come back.

. . . . .

Next morning, as was to be expected, I woke late. As I lay in a half-doze, to my ears came the voices of two women talking over the fire.

"Out all night!" Miss Liddicoat remarked, with the thin sucking of the lips of a woman savouring a dainty bit of scandal. "Not that I ever expected he'd come back at all."

"Out all night, with that creature!" Miss Rice ejaculated vindictively.

"And he a new-made widower!"

"Nice goings-on for a respectable grocer, *I* say!"

So it went on. Evidently Greatheart had crept to some dark corner of the cave, and was sleeping without a move.

Some one went past me towards the mouth of



the cave. As his figure blotted out the light, I saw it was Bisscop. Then, from outside, I heard his excited shout, "The ship!"

In the rush for the mouth of the cave I was the last to reach the open air. I found all the others silently staring.

There, clear-cut in the morning sunshine, was a schooner, not a mile from the shore. A dainty looking vessel, her sails furled, yet moving, at first sight mysteriously, slowly on over the calm sea, straight for the shore. Then we noticed the white of her wake: she was coming comfortably on under the power of an auxiliary oil engine. And as we watched, we saw the vessel beautifully come to rest and heard the sharp rattle of the chain as the anchor slid to bottom. It was a beautiful, a heart-lifting sight, that pretty little toy ship, coming so confidently, so calmly to anchorage in our little cove. It meant home for us; and in that moment even my sub-editor's desk on a long hot night, with the ceaseless thudding of the great machines, the rush and scramble of the last half-hour, the smell of ink and the sense of irritable weariness—all that seemed to me better than our island: all that meant to me home.

Then a little doubt intruded. I glanced at the faces of the other watchers. That same uneasiness was already faintly there.



"But that can't be the rescue vessel," I said, perplexed. "They would send a steamer—not a tiny schooner."

"Probably there's a whole lot of vessels searching," Bisscop replied. "Anyway, even if they're not looking for us, we're looking for them. We're saved, though it's quite possible those people don't know yet there's anybody to save."

"And they're landing," Miss Rice cried. "Look, they're lowering a boat."

"Quick," cried Bisscop, "let's go down and welcome them!"

"Wait!"

My first thought was that the quiet, authoritative voice was Podmore's, whom I had not noticed in our group at the cave mouth. But when we simultaneously turned it was a blinking grocer who stood silhouetted against the darkness of the cave.

"You!" the two women gasped, too surprised to move.

"You're really back?" Miss Rice could not believe her twinkling eyes. "Oh!" she doated, "and we thought we had lost you. But I always *said* you'd come back."

Greatheart had no time for civility or scenes. He pushed his way past the women to the cliff edge.

"Ah," he said, "Podmore's seen them."

From our height we were spectators, as from the gallery of a theatre, of a ludicrous sight. Podmore, who had evidently been taking his morning bath in the river, had heard the rattle of her anchor chain, and without a thought of his nakedness he was now making his way through the scrub towards the beach, a podgy, grotesque figure, cantering clumsily along.

"The fool!" Greatheart exclaimed. "How does he know they're not enemies?"

"Why should they be?" Miss Rice protested. "Why did they come here if not to rescue us?"

"What brings them ashore just here? There's no signal of distress up. They can't have a suspicion that there's anybody here."

"Podmore will soon know, anyhow," said Bisscop. "Look, those men in the boat have seen him."

While we had been watching Podmore's progress to the beach we had not seen that a boat, with three men in it, had put off from the schooner and was now half-way to the shore. And, indeed, the wildly gesticulating figure of the naked Podmore could not have long remained unnoticed as it lumbered across the shining expanse of sand. Suddenly an order was given by the man steering, and the two rowers lay on their oars. The steersman,

shading his brow with his hand, carefully scrutinised the extraordinary apparition of a fat, naked white savage.

It was evident from the quick interchange of talk in the stationary boat—we could see their excited gestures—that the last thing these strangers had expected to meet on the island was a stout nude Cupid.

Podmore, his wind giving out in the last hundred yards, had reached the shore, and stood, gesticulating at the strangers. The man at the rudder merely raised his arm, with something in his hand that dully glinted in the sunlight.

We saw, horror-stricken, a white puff of smoke and a scattering spurt of sand over Podmore's figure. The fat man collapsed, then, to our relief and somewhat to our surprise, lifted himself to his feet with an unexpected agility and fled grotesquely up the beach. And, as he sped, he dodged and ducked as if from following bullets.

But the man in the boat did not fire again. He had raised his arm, but, realising the improbability of hitting the bird on the wing after missing a pot shot, he put his revolver back into his belt.

So Podmore regained the safety of the scrub. At his disappearance the steersman gave a brief

order to his men, and the boat continued her interrupted way to the beach.

As it happened, this move was lucky for us; for in making their landing their attention was taken off Podmore, and thus they missed seeing the figure of Podmore, spent, blown, but once more clothed in his ragged pyjamas, painfully climb the cliff and totter along the narrow path to us.

"The fiends!" he spluttered as he collapsed at our feet. "They fired at me."

"You saw them close?" Greatheart eagerly asked. "Who are they?"

"Murderers!"

"But what are they like? Quick, man!"

"How could I see, when they were all firing at me. The bullets were whistling all round me."

"But the man who fired? Describe him. It's most important."

Podmore, frightened even more—if it were possible—by the grocer's tone, struggled to get his senses back. "He looked like a foreigner," he said at last. "A swarthy, scoundrelly face, a devil's face. A Spaniard or an Italian."

"It's him, the Dago!" Greatheart cried. "I thought I recognised the schooner. It's the man who lost the paper in my shop in Woolloomooloo—the man who ordered all

those stores from me and made such a secret about it. Yes, it's him, the man who said the paper he lost was worth thousands, and I've got it in my pocket-book!"

Hurriedly Greatheart told the others the outlines of the strange story that he had told me under the double-branched palm. He even took the precious paper from his pocket-book. The others, crowding round, examined it with a curiosity that was almost awe.

"He's come for that?" Bisscop said. "It's only a lot of gibberish."

"No," the grocer replied. "They can't know I've got it. They can't know I'm here. And why should they fire at Podmore? Well, whatever their rascally game is, we'll soon know. And in this cave we're safe. We could defend it against a hundred. Why, they won't even know we're here. They can't have seen Podmore making his way back. They won't guess the existence of the cave. All we've got to do is to lie hid—we've got plenty of provisions—and watch them unseen."

The grocer was happy again. Here was a campaign to plan, an army to lead, a castle to hold. He had completely forgotten the syren of the forest. He was a man again.

## CHAPTER IX

## THE STRANGERS

“WHY,” said Miss Rice, peering over the edge of the rock, “whatever are they up to now?”

The actions of the strangers were certainly curious. They had pulled their boat up on the beach, then, almost running in their eagerness, they had made straight for the cocoa-nut palm with the double-branching stem. Here they had now halted and were gazing, as if fascinated, at its strange bifurcation. Evidently they found it very interesting. At length they stepped from the shade of its double crown and looked long and earnestly about them.

“Keep back!” Greatheart cried. “They’re looking for our camp.”

Whatever they were looking for they did not find. They stood arguing, one, their leader, wishing to proceed along the beach in our direction, the other two equally inclined to go



in the opposite direction. The leader tried persuasion, argument, and at last threats. We saw the revolver in his raised hand. The others were convinced.

The three came slowly along the beach, looking carefully about them, till they reached the shallow outlet of the stream. They greeted their discovery with a shout, and unanimously turned inland, following along its edge. As the banks of the river rose abruptly from the shore, the river having cut its way through a ravine, and the jungle encroached to the water's edge, they were soon forced to wade. They made two efforts to climb the cliffs, but without success; and as the pathway of the river narrowed they had to force their way against a swiftly running stream.

At last they disappeared from our view behind a ridge of forest. We waited long before we caught sight of them again—at the same place, returning. Evidently, owing to the fact that, as we had discovered, here the river was compressed into a narrow gorge, they had given up their attempt. Equally impassable, by the way they had come, was the forest. Unless they hit upon the track through the scrub that had led us to the cave, our hiding place was safe from discovery.

We watched them go, with lagging footsteps,

disappointment in their heavy movements. Arrived at the double-branched palm, they threw themselves wearily on the ground, and after a while apparently renewed their discussion. The result was that they returned to their boat, launched it and rowed back to the schooner.

We watched the vessel all the rest of the afternoon, but saw no signs of its preparation for departure. And at night we saw its riding light winking at us in our eyrie.

Many and far-fetched were the conjectures we indulged in as to the meaning of this visit. The outstanding point was the strangers' obvious interest in the double-stemmed palm.

"That makes me certain," said Greatheart, "that the man in charge is the man who lost the paper in my shop. You see," he produced the scribble of gibberish again, "it is the first item mentioned in the list. It is a phrase a man would not be likely to forget; and the palm is a sort of landmark to any ship on this coast. To my mind it's a sort of signal."

"For what?" I naturally asked.

"How do I know, except that it's a—well, say a clue."

"To the galleon's treasure," Podmore suggested.

The grocer waved the remark aside. "The galleon's treasure would have gone down with

the galleon; and that's five miles along the coast. If they were searching for the galleon, they would not anchor in a cove that hasn't a reef in it. No; what they want has something to do with the cocoa-nut palm. That's certain. Well"—he brightened visibly—"it's only another of the mysteries of the island. Really, I couldn't imagine a more exciting place to be shipwrecked on, could you?"

Greatheart was himself again. The memory of the grocer's abashed return to the cave the previous evening, his humility and his obsession of the woman, was wiped away by this man of action—the Greatheart that inspired confidence, the leader we looked up to. The need for action had broken the spell. Work was the one antidote that could have saved him; and here, indeed, was work enough. His own life, and ours, if we considered the reception accorded to the naked Podmore, depended on his vigilance. And, shaking the lulling dream from his little, drowsy eyes, he had emerged, clear-visioned, alert, a leader of men.

I thought it wise, until the present danger was past, to keep that woman out of Greatheart's memory. As long as we were shut up in the cave she could not cause trouble. But Miss Rice interfered.

"They've come, of course, to see that woman,"

she abruptly said. "She has made them a signal they have been looking for, and they've come to help her." She pounced on Greatheart. "And you spoke to her last night," she said with a bitterness astonishing in her; "you had quite a long conversation with her—goodness knows what you talked about! Surely you know?"

The grocer miserably shook his head, and, with a gesture of hopelessness, turned away and entered the cave.

And, left with the others, I had to answer their eager questions. I told them the nothing I had learnt from my fruitless questioning of the grocer. Then I impressed upon them the absolute need for no further reference in his presence to the strange woman. I pointed out the change I had seen in him, the strength of her influence over him, and how our very lives might depend on making him forget her. The need for action, the presence of unknown dangers, had keyed him up again to his true self; but the woman had only to beckon and he would leave us.

Rebellion flamed in the women's eyes. So I told them how and why he had come back to us.

"He left her?" Miss Rice cried exultantly. "She couldn't hold him! Ah! I knew that he could never stand that sort of woman—not a man of the strength of character of Mr. Great-

heart. I've been a beast. To think that even for an instant I could have doubted him!"

"But surely he told you all about the creature?" Miss Liddicoat persisted.

"Only that she had wonderful eyes."

"Much good they were to her!" Miss Rice almost sneered. "We've got him back."

. . . . .

Next morning the schooner was still at anchor in the cove, and again we saw the boat leaving the vessel, with the same three men in it. They disembarked at the same spot, and made straight for the palm. But this time they were all armed. They were carrying what looked like rifles on their shoulders.

As they reached the neighbourhood of the palm, to our surprise they began digging in the sand. The things on their shoulders that we had mistaken for rifles were spades.

All that forenoon they worked on the beach, not digging systematically, but tentatively trying various places all along the beach, and even inland at the edge of the scrub, right up to the edge of the river. It looked to us as if, failing to find the landmarks for which they were searching, they were spasmodically trying their luck. But, as far as we could see, they were not rewarded; for at midday they threw down their



tools and made for the shade of the palm. There they lit a fire, and, procuring stores from the boat, cooked a meal. After dinner they separated, each taking a spade with him and disappearing into the bush. Toward sundown one after the other emerged, compared notes and ultimately returned to the schooner.

It was a wearying day for us, cooped up within the limits of the cave and the tiny platform at its mouth, with nothing to do but watch the strangers. The inaction got on our nerves. At last Bisscop appealed to us to let him sneak down and spy on the intruders; but there was the risk that his descent might be observed and the location of the cave revealed.

At intervals one of us would ask Greatheart for the paper, and vainly endeavour to make some meaning out of its strangely jumbled list of items. But gradually we came to the conviction that the paper afforded the clue to the strangers' haphazard movements. If it was treasure that they were seeking, the secret of its hiding place was in our ignorant hands. It was, of course, useless to us, unless, which seemed hopeless, we could make sense of its unintelligible gibberish.

From the attention the men had paid the double-branched palm, it was plain that that tree



formed an important item in the directions necessary to uncover whatever they were seeking. But what did the carpenter's T-square mean, and where was one to find "217 lbs. of sugar" even though it was stipulated that it was to be of the "cheapest quality"? And what was "305 yards of watered silk" and "1 box of aerated waters" doing on a tropical island? And who could get any sense out of "1 musician's triangle"?

"You know," Miss Rice said at last, pushing the paper irritably aside, "you have no right to keep that. It doesn't belong to you, does it? It was all right to keep when you didn't know where the rightful owner was; but he's down there now, and by keeping it you are practically stealing it. Morally, we ought to give it up."

We looked at each other in surprise. This point of view had never occurred to us. Had such a request been made to any of us in Sydney, we would have at once complied. Indeed, we would not have needed the reminder. But the plain fact was that we had deteriorated, lost touch with the decencies of the civilisation we had left so far behind. The veneer had been scraped off us; and the least jolt from the unfamiliar will show how thin that veneer is. Scratch a suburbanite—steal his fowls, for instance—and you will find a ravening savage.

It was Miss Rice's question that sharply made us aware of the depth of our fall. We had been so near death, we had suffered so much, we had had so hard a fight with plain facts, such as hunger and privation and toil and personal danger, from which the comfortable blanket of civilisation had hitherto protected us. We had lived too precariously and too strenuously to retain the graces and the refinements, even the morals of social life. The veneer had been not merely scratched; it had been ripped bodily off. Under the stress we had discarded the trappings, moral as well as physical, that hitherto we had regarded as as much our own as our skins. We had unconsciously relapsed into the simpler, sterner code of primitive man. We woke now to the realisation of the bare fact that we had slipped back to the primitive age, where might was right and the only sceptre was the strong hairy arm.

With the loss of my black bowler hat and my stiff collar had gone my badge of respectability. Stripped to my pyjamas, I had reverted to the state of mind of a man escaping from a burning building. All the elaborate complex of prohibitions and restraints had been sloughed off; my hands had become predatory claws.

And so, I fear, it was with the others. All our chivalry had been swallowed up in the mere will to live. We had only one loyalty left—the

ancient loyalty to the clan. All outsiders were enemies ; but the clan, for its own protection—the first lesson learnt in man's long struggle into manhood—stuck together united by the most selfish interest. And in this fierce antagonism to the world, forced upon us by the world's bleak antagonism to us, we had cast overboard all the scruples and daintinesses of civilised morals. Inside the clan we still lived a civilised life—the only civilisation we knew ; but to the world outside its confines our fangs were instinctively bared.

Miss Rice had retained a few scruples ; but these, of course, were not impermeable to the logic of facts.

"For," said the grocer indignantly, "they tried to kill one of us."

The clan loyalty flamed in the boarding-house keeper's barbaric eyes. "Of course, that makes all the difference," she admitted. "They've declared war on us, and we must fight them."

She rose, a flashing Boadicea.

The grocer's eyes dwelt appreciatively upon this Amazon in an ulster. "If they want this paper," he said gravely, "they'll have to get it over my dead body."

Uncivilised as I was, even then I felt a false note in the grocer's boast. There was danger, of course, if the strangers, desperate men as we

feared them to be, discovered our hiding place. But a suspicion occurred to me that they had fired at Podmore merely to scare away any inquisitive intruders, to leave them freedom for their work. Yet, had the bullet been a foot higher——

None of us, at that moment, dreamed that Greatheart might soon have to make good his vaunt.

. . . . .

It was Miss Liddicoat who was to blame.

On going out next morning I noticed on the rock outside the cave a white garment. It was one of the women's nightdresses, newly washed, put there to dry in the sun.

I snatched it off. It was altogether too noticeable against the dark hue of the rocks. From the schooner it would appear as a bright patch—almost as a signal or a flag. Our only hope against discovery lay in the chance that no inquisitive eyes had been turned in our direction.

I spoke of it to the others, and the girl admitted her indiscretion. Greatheart was angry and gave that young lady a talking to such as I feel sure she had never listened to before. There was no politeness in the grocer's stinging remarks. The clan had been placed in danger by her. The clan must punish her.

Bisscop spoke hotly in her defence; and, frankly, there was a pretty row. Our nerves were all at tension. We were as lacking in control as a crowd at a football match or a legislature during a "scene." But Miss Rice and I took Greatheart's side, the woman sinking her sex loyalty to that of her world; and at last the quarrel died into a sullen silence. The simple life is, after all, very much like any other life. We were merely two suburban wives calling each other names over the backyard fence.

There was nothing to do now but to wait developments. These were not long in coming. The three men left the ship and rowed briskly to their accustomed landing. This time, however, they did not bother with the palm. They came straight along the beach to the outlet of the stream. Up this they waded, as before, and disappeared from our sight behind the intervening ridge. Evidently they had a definite objective.

It was midday before they gave us any further sign. I was alone at our observation post behind the largest rock. The others were at the midday meal. A shout—it seemed almost at my back—made me turn hurriedly. I saw nobody. Then I recognised that it was only the echo from the overhanging cliff. The man who sent forth that jovial "Hullo!" was below,



at the base of the cliff. I peered cautiously round the rock, and saw three men standing almost exactly below me, at the further edge of the river, which here swirled close to the base of the rock. They had evidently been closely watching; and the hail had achieved its effect. They saw me. I ran into the cave and quietly summoned the others. Greatheart kept the women back.

"You speak to them," he said. "They mustn't see me."

I "cooeed" from behind my rock.

"Where are you?" a voice shouted back.

"His voice—the Dago's!" Greatheart whispered.

"I'm not going to show myself," I replied. "You shot at one of us."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" the voice laughed. "That was only a bluff. Well, here goes."

Raising my head cautiously, I saw the three men deposit their three revolvers carefully on the sand at their feet. I stood up and looked them over. They returned my scrutiny with equal interest.

One, evidently the leader, was a slim, dark man, the chief features of whose clean-shaven face at this distance were his thick, black eyebrows. I recognised him from Greatheart's description as the foreigner whom he had met



in his shop at Woolloomooloo. The second was a mere youth, about Bisscop's age, quite beautifully dressed in white duck. The third was a little, wizened old man, whose precise, business-like demeanour seemed strangely out of place against that tropical background of jungle.

I gathered from their quick interchange of talk that I was not the person they had expected to see.

"What do you want?" I called down.

"You know," was the impatient reply from the Spanish-looking man.

"I don't."

"Well, your boss does. Why doesn't he show himself?"

It did not need Greatheart's gesture to give me the clue. "I'm the boss here," I called. "That is, if we have any boss. We're a party of shipwrecked castaways, and are anxious only to get back to civilisation. But you fired at one of us. Why?"

The spotless youth chuckled. "That fat, naked chap, eh? He looked like a dressed turkey. Nobody could have helped firing at that, surely? I bet *you* would have fired, too. And did you see him run?"

"That settles it," I said, indignant at such reckless callousness. "You don't get another

chance of potting us. You can't reach us here, and we're not fools enough to come down. We've got water and food enough to last us a month; and long before that's up the search steamer will be here to take us off."

I could see that they did not believe me.

"How many of you are there?" the old man asked.

I lied easily, "Five."

"We'll take you all off in our schooner," the dark man said quickly. "We're a party of scientists, collecting insects for an American millionaire's museum. Sorry I fired at one of you; but I never expected to find anything but natives here, and he did look rather ferocious, didn't he? Anyway, I didn't fire to hit him—just to scare him away. We'll be here for a day or two longer, just to complete our entomological collection, and then we're off direct to Manilla. We ought to be back there in a month."

It sounded convincing, after all. The Podmore incident might be explained by mere light-hearted recklessness; and, for all we could tell, they might be scientists, and their spades a necessary part of the equipment of a scientific exploration party. And though the grocer had recognised the foreigner, that individual might be an entomologist, and the paper

in Greatheart's possession might be merely some scientific memoranda.

"Wait a minute," I called down. "I'll ask the others."

But as I turned away, distinctly to my ears came an echoing whisper from the wall behind me. The youth below, in his relief, had forgotten to lower his voice sufficiently, and had evidently no indication how clear was the echo from the overhanging cliff. "Got 'em!" I heard.

I leant over the rock. "Thanks for the offer," I said politely, "but we prefer to wait for the arrival of the search steamer. That would take us straight back to Sydney long before you would have reached the Philippines. And we're quite comfortable here."

"But surely——" the dark man began earnestly.

"Frankly," I cut him short, "we don't trust you."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Well, you might let us have a look at you—if there *are* five of you."

I saw no harm in letting them see our strength. Greatheart, of course, lay concealed, while Bisscop and Podmore joined me at the edge of the platform.

The strangers seemed startled. I turned to find that Miss Rice and Miss Liddicoat, their

curiosity overcoming their prudence, were ranged with us in full sight of the three men.

"Women."

We stared at their stupefaction. They had not for a moment believed our account of ourselves.

"And one of them," muttered the brisk youth, in what he obviously meant to be a confidence to the dark man, "extremely pretty!"

The two women flushed with delight.

But the leader of the strangers was not satisfied. "That all?" he shouted.

I nodded.

"Where's the grocer?" he insisted.

I vigorously denied all knowledge of grocers.

"So you won't come down," the little fussy man asked at last. "I may remind you that our time is valuable."

"Ours is not."

"Then may we come up—just a courtesy call?" the youth asked.

"No; we prefer to keep people who shoot strangers at sight at a distance. We can't afford to take any risks. We have women to protect."

"Lucky beggars!" the youth shouted blithely back.

For a few minutes the three men conferred. Then their leader stepped forward. He had

cast aside all pretence of good-humour; his voice rang angrily out.

"We don't believe your cock-and-bull story. We know why you've come, and you know why we've come. We quite understand each other, don't we? Now, you come down to us—all of you, including the grocer—or——"

"Or what?" I called down. Then quickly, to the women, "Duck!"

They were just in time. For the foreigner stooped for his revolver; and simultaneously the other men recovered theirs. But as we slid to safety behind the rocks, I noticed the little old man grab the other's extended arm.

We waited anxiously for the report. None came. At last I cautiously peered round, not over, the rock. The little man had seized the other's hand; and this is what I clearly heard:

"As chairman of directors, I have already ruled that there must be no bloodshed except as a last resource." The speaker turned politely to the youth. "And I feel sure that the majority of the board will support their chairman's ruling?"

The spruce young man laughed. "The silly fool," he said, "might have killed that particularly pretty woman."

Sulkily the foreigner put up his weapon. I



heard behind me two sighs of happiness. Both women had caught the youth's remark.

"There's plenty of other ways of getting at them," the fussy old gentleman remarked testily. Then, raising his voice for our benefit. "We'll starve you out."

His leader sullenly acquiesced. I distinctly caught his next remarks. "You don't know the man you have to deal with," he said, with sombre conviction. "That grocer would stick at nothing. He is a desperate man. But what did you make me general manager for if you always outvote me on the board? I could have got one of those thieves that time, and the others later on. They aren't armed." Then, in a voice meant for us, "We'll wait till you come down—till you have to come down. And we'll make you pay for the delay."

The three turned, making their way down the river edge. They did not suspect the existence of the old track that had led us to the discovery of the cave. And as they disappeared from our sight, the immaculate youth, who was last, deliberately threw a kiss at our wondering group.

Miss Rice and Miss Liddicoat expertly caught it.



## CHAPTER X

## THE BOUQUETS

“**D**O you know,” Bisscop carelessly remarked, when the strangers had disappeared, “I know those chaps.”

He dropped his bomb-shell as negligently as he would throw away a match.

“Met ’em, and all that,” he added, stemming our torrent of questions.

“Where?”

“Coming out on the steamer to Australia, a good many months ago. Been trying to remember their names. One was Cadwallader—that young fellow. Rather decent sort of chap, I thought.”

“But he didn’t recognise you.”

“Not likely,” Bisscop drawled, “in these rotten clothes, eh?”

“But who is he, and what’s he doing here?” Greatheart questioned.

“He’s the chap who got hold of the clue, of course,” Bisscop said somewhat wearily, astonished at our obtuseness.

The clue! And here had been its explanation all the time!

"Cadwallader was secretary of the Sports' Committee on board the boat coming out, you know," Bisscop began. "Got up silly tin-pot games you don't want to play, you know—picking up potatoes and dropping the silly things into buckets, threading needles and pretending to play golf by putting into chalk rings on the deck. More like marbles, eh? But he was a good break bowler. One afternoon he and I got the whole of the married men's side out for a duck. Rather a record, don't you think? He cleaned bowled five of 'em. That's how I got to know him. We got talking in between whiles when he wasn't getting up concerts for the women and gymkhanas and sweeps on the day's run. And one night he told me about his precious clue."

"He showed it to you?" I interjected.

"No; too valuable. Kept it in the purser's safe. Told me about it, though. Something like this. I thought he was rotting, don't you know. His father had somehow got hold of some papers about a Spanish treasure in a tropical island. Sort of stuff you read in the magazines."

"But how did his father get it?" Podmore heavily asked.

"From one of the survivors?" Greatheart suggested confidently.

"Survivors of the men who buried it nearly two centuries ago?" Bisscop laughed. "No; these papers came from Spain. Old Cadwallader came across them in London. A sailor told him a yarn about getting the papers from a Spanish sailor, and offered old Cadwallader the lot for five pounds. The sailor was starving, or nearly so, and Cadwallader gave him some money—ten shillings or so—but he wouldn't look at the papers. About a year afterwards a packet arrived at his London office addressed to him, and in it was a note from the sailor thanking him for what he had done and asking him to keep the papers. Cadwallader put them away and forgot them. Then, one day he got a new clerk, a chap who could speak Spanish; and, just to test him, Cadwallader got out the papers and told him to write a translation of them. Can't think of the clerk's name; he had Italian blood in him. Anyway, he was the blighter who tried to pot Podmore on the beach."

"The Dago. *My Dago!*" Greatheart exulted.

"Yes. He and the other man you saw down there were on board, too. Didn't speak much to anybody, those two. Well, the Italian chap,

Sal—Salvini. No; Sabini!—that was his confounded name—came to old Cadwallader with the news that the old sailor's papers contained the story of the wreck of a Spanish galleon——”

“*Our* galleon!” Greatheart cried.

“On a tropical island.”

“*Our* island!” This from Miss Rice.

“Looks pretty like it, don't it? The yarn young Cadwallader told me was that, nearly two hundred years ago, the galleon came to grief on a reef, and the crew decided to take the treasure ashore and bury it safe. Of course, they meant to come back and collar it; but the package of papers told how in the end only two men managed to get back to civilisation, and one of them died soon after. I guess the other rotter must have hastened his death. But the survivor couldn't raise the cash to return for the treasure—expensive matter in those days, I should say, and risky—but before he died he wrote down all particulars. That was the first thing the package contained; but there were other writings, from which it appeared that some one else had had a try for the treasure. This chap, so he said in a different handwriting, had found the island from the directions and had made an effort to get the stuff; but something happened—the account was very vague about it—and he came away, and was, I gathered, very

glad to come away without it. But he set out very carefully the exact position of the place where the treasure was buried. And that was only fifty years or so ago. How the papers got into the old sailor's hands there was nothing to show."

"Did it state," I asked, "exactly what the treasure was?"

"No," Bisscop said. "It referred to it every time as 'the treasure'; but, of course, that must have meant gold."

"Of course, it was gold," Podmore said thickly and lusciously. "Gold ingots! Spanish doubloons!"

"Still, if those men," the grocer objected, "have got the full directions, what do they want with this piece of paper I've got? And why can't they go straight ahead and find the stuff?"

"That's just the curious thing about it," Bisscop answered. "When Cadwallader's father found out the gold mine he had struck, he got a bit scared that some one else might get hold of his secret—and I suspect he didn't quite like trusting his secret to a mere clerk like Sabini. So he decided to commit the directions for finding the treasure to memory—the son told me his father was very proud of his memory—and he burnt the document, and saw to it that Sabini hadn't any copy of it. But in case he forgot



any part of the directions—they were pretty intricate, I believe—he made a sort of reminder, and wrote that down. It was so constructed, young Cadwallader said, that if it fell into anybody else's hands, they could make no sense out of it. And yet, if you knew how it had been constructed, you had only to go right along and scoop up the bally gold."

"Our clue?" Greatheart cried in triumph.

"Yes, it must be the very thing," said Bisscop. "Didn't connect it before with those chaps, you know."

He went on. "So old Cadwallader's father had the directions all right in his noddle, with the paper on which he had jotted down his memorandum to fall back upon in case he forgot. He hadn't too much ready cash, so he took his discovery to a local solicitor—that's the fussy old fellow who objects to fire-arms—I'll remember his name in a minute. And the solicitor got up a sort of syndicate—limited liability company kind of affair. They made the solicitor chairman."

"Chairman of directors!" the grocer exclaimed. "Wasn't that what he called himself down there half an hour ago?"

"Yes; and the clerk who knew Spanish, though I think he's an Italian, was appointed manager of the expedition to search for the



treasure, and everything was ready for the start when old Cadwallader went and died."

"Slain by the Dago!" Greatheart almost hissed.

"No; by asthma."

Greatheart drooped. Life was always playing him sordid tricks like that. It is a way life has with the romantic temperament—especially in grocers.

"It was a set-back all right," Bisscop continued. "Here was the secret in a dead man's head; and all he had left was an unintelligible sort of memoranda, without any clue to its meaning. It nearly smashed up the limited liability company. But the solicitor had the clue—such as it was—in his office safe. The board met—they put young Cadwallader on in his father's place—and spent some days in trying to decipher it with the help of Sabini's vague memory of the original documents. No use. Then they decided that, as all the preparations were made, to send the expedition out to the island; they knew where that was, anyway. The solicitor johnny, who was run down with overwork, or something, had been ordered a sea-trip by his doctor. He insisted on coming along with Cadwallader and Sabini. I thought from what I saw of the three on the boat coming out that the old chap didn't quite trust the foreigner.

Cadwallader told me that, as they knew the position of the island, they'd soon be able to puzzle out the meaning of the clue when once they were on the spot."

"Well, *we're* on the spot, and we can't puzzle the blamed thing out," I said helplessly.

"Wait!" said Greatheart grandly.

Bisscop almost frowned, except that his smooth forehead had no room to frown. He was evidently thinking. We watched, awe-struck. We had never seen him thinking before.

"Bibb!" he triumphantly exclaimed.

We stared at him.

"Yes, Bibb!" he confidently repeated.

"What on earth has a bib to do with it?" Miss Rice asked, exasperated.

"That's his name—the little solicitor's name—I knew I'd remember it. Bibb."

. . . . .

Late that afternoon we saw the three again. This time they had evidently argued that there must be an easier way to our cave than the difficult passage up the river bed. The result of a careful examination of the foreshore was the discovery of the ancient track that had served us so well.

With them, as they emerged with a triumphant shout from the bush below the cave, we saw a

couple of natives—evidently from the crew of the schooner—carrying the equipment for a camp. Before sunset the five of them had managed to erect two small tents in the shelter of a group of trees just opposite where the path from the cave came down to the river's edge. They had opened the siege. They meant to starve us out.

Of course, they could not have been aware of the fact that we had a permanent supply of water. Probably they counted on us having merely a few days' supply stored. We could afford to wait.

That evening they lit a huge fire whose light sharply illuminated the only possible descent from our cave. They sent the two natives back to the vessel; and during the night they kept a strict watch. There was always one of the men on guard from that moment. We took turns in watching the enemy; but there was no attempt on their part to attack us, or force an entrance into the cave. Indeed, they must have recognised that any such foolishness could only result in their defeat. Our position was impregnable to any conceivable attempt, unless they could take us by surprise.

From the actions of the enemy, and the priceless information given to us by Bisscop, we were enabled to hazard a good guess at their motives and intentions. They had not recognised in the tattered figure of Bisscop their fellow-

passenger on their voyage to Australia. They were convinced that their opponent was the Woolloomooloo grocer. And, from their point of view, their conviction seemed overwhelmingly probable.

All had gone well with their expedition until they were on the point of embarking from Sydney. They had bought and commissioned a useful schooner, provisioned her secretly, and were about to start when Sabini, their manager, lost the indispensable clue. Naturally, they would be convinced that the priceless piece of paper had been stolen, and by some one who had more than an inkling of its value and meaning. What to do, then? Nothing but to push ahead and attempt to forestall their unknown rivals. They knew the exact position of the island of treasure. There must be some landmark that would indicate to them the whereabouts of the pirates' hoard. And that landmark, it was now plain to us, could only have been the curious cocoa-nut palm with its double stem. For we had seen how they had made that palm the starting point of their search.

Though the clue had been stolen, the expedition had the knowledge of the landmark—they doubtless remembered that it formed the first item in the list of things mentioned in the clue.

Find the double-branched palm, and, with luck, they would unearth the treasure.

So they had worked their way under sail slowly up to the north of Australia, and arrived at a spot that tallied with their other information. Till then, doubtless, they would have had no reason for suspecting that they had been forestalled by their rivals. Their consternation at the sight of a white man on the beach had been extreme. It was to them, in their great disappointment and rage, practically a declaration of war; and they had not hesitated to act on their belief. The fact that there were others on the island, and on the very spot where the treasure was concealed, must have made them busily put two and two together.

The priceless clue had been lost, or stolen, in Sydney, the very day of their departure. If it had been picked up by an ordinary man, he would have seen no value in it, and thrown it away again. But if the clue had been taken by some one who knew, or shrewdly guessed at, the object of the expedition?

Who, in Sydney, could have known? The purchase of the schooner had been arranged, doubtless, before the arrival of the three men in Australia, made through a reliable agent who would not have divulged the names or objects of his principals. But in the ordering of stores for



the voyage such secrecy could not be maintained. Doubtless it was to limit the chances of leakage that the extraordinary course was followed of buying all their stores from the shop of an obscure grocer at Woolloomooloo. One suburban grocer's suspicions did not matter. But now it appeared to them that it was this one tiny leak in their rampart of precautions that had let the ocean in. For Sabini surely remembered that he had admitted the loss of the paper to the grocer, and had made the damning confession that it was of a surprising value to him.

Now—how, it was not quite clear—the grocer must have got hold of the clue and, with some knowledge of its value, had organised this expedition with such haste that here their rivals were installed on the very scene of operations. But how could the grocer know what they were after? At this point, probably, Cadwallader might have confessed talking a little unguardedly about their scheme, either on the boat out or in Sydney; and some one must have brought this information to the ears of the grocer. Of course, this was one of the weakest links of the chain; but every chain has a weak link. Much of their reasoning was mere surmise; but undeniable facts stared them in the face. Somehow the destination of the expedition and its objects had leaked out.



Such was the chain of reasoning by which, we conceived, they had arrived at the perturbing fact that there was competition to meet, an enemy to account for. It was a logical chain, granting the falsity of its premises. So, obsessed by their suspicion of us, they scouted our plain story of a party of survivors from a shipwreck. For one thing, calling at few or out-of-the-way ports, they would not have heard of the wreck of the liner; and finally, they were not likely to put down to mere chance our presence on the very spot where they were convinced the treasure was hidden. The absence of any vessel in the cove admitted, to them, of an easy explanation. Our ship had dropped us for our work, and would return later to pick us and the treasure up. As for our tattered appearance, that was either a disguise adopted in case of the appearance of strangers—a rather far-fetched supposition—or, what would appear to them as more likely, the result of some disaster that had overtaken us while on the island.

It was a pretty and a plausible theory.

. . . . .

For the next two days there was no change in the situation. We “sat tight,” husbanded our food stores, kept continual watch and

waited. On their part, the visitors guarded the exit down the cliff, day and night. During the day while one, well armed, remained as sentry, the others made a systematic exploration of the neighbourhood, setting off each time carrying picks and spades.

All through this time of inaction we watched for the appearance of the search-steamer. The news of the disaster must have reached civilisation; if the ship was a week overdue the Australian Government would take prompt action. The recent loss of the *Waratak*, and the strenuous efforts made by Australia to discover news of her fate, even after all hope of rescue had been abandoned by the world, cheered us with the confidence of a speedy and thorough search. Not one inch of land would be missed. The archipelago would be painstakingly combed. But the fact that at the time of the catastrophe we were so far from our usual course might at first lead the search to the wrong quarter. But any dawn now might bring with it the welcome smudge of smoke over the horizon.

Greatheart, however, did not look out with us to sea. His eyes searched the dense forest behind us and the far-flung crescent of beach. He expected succour nearer at hand.

Indeed, it was curious that since that night

of moonlight we had received no sign of the existence of the strange woman. The grocer was puzzled. The girl must have learnt of the presence of the strangers on her island. And, if so, it would have been easy for her, by spying, to glean the purpose of their visit and their intentions towards us. And, whatever her feelings toward the rest of us, at least she must have had some concern over the plight of the grocer.

"She will come," Greatheart answered when at last I spoke my thought. "She will come at the right time—at her own time."

His queen could do no wrong.

On the afternoon of the third day of the siege, however, it became evident that the strangers were becoming uneasy. Our surrender had been unaccountably delayed. They must have had some suspicion that we had access to a permanent supply of water. And they had wasted much valuable time. The result of this change of attitude took the form of a visit from Cadwallader, the speckless youth in white who had distributed his kiss evenly between the two women.

Bisscop, on guard at the mouth of the cave, announced the news that Cadwallader was climbing up the cliff. We watched him reach the end of the cliff track, and begin to make his leisurely way toward us.

"Is he armed?" Greatheart, who was concealed behind a rock, anxiously asked.

"Not that I can see," said Bisscop over his shoulder. "Keep back, all of you. He's got something curious in his hand, though. It's—it's a bouquet."

"A bouquet?" Miss Liddicoat echoed, with widened eyes.

"Yes, of tropical flowers," Bisscop replied, as if flowers were the usual present to shipwrecked survivors, or, from their view-point, a mob of desperate ruffians.

"It's a trap," Podmore exclaimed. "He's got a revolver hidden in those flowers."

"Challenge him," our commander ordered.

Bisscop suddenly quietly stepped from the shelter of his rock.

"Hullo, Cadwallader," he genially remarked.

Peering round from my hiding place I saw that youth's jaw drop. He almost let his flowers fall.

"Whew!" he whistled. "The chap I knew on the boat! Bisscop!"

"Yes," said Bisscop. "Hope you're feeling fit?"

"Ripping," the other politely replied. "So it was you," he went on curiously, "you, all the time. And we thought it was the grocer fellow. Well," he was evidently, behind that impassive

English face, thinking rapidly, "as it's a friend, I'll just drop in and have a chat. It's rather warm out here in the sun, isn't it?"

His step toward Bisscop was checked by that youth's warning. "Better not," he said quietly. "As a matter of fact, we're not at home to-day—not receiving, don't you know—some other day, perhaps."

"Sorry," Cadwallader murmured, hesitating. Then a look came into his blue eyes that I interpreted. He was calculating the chance he had of overpowering Bisscop with a spring.

Bisscop knew, too. "You know, old chap," he said, "you can't get past me. The foothold isn't too good on this narrow track, is it? I would have an unfair advantage here. And"—he glanced below—"it's a pretty decent drop to the bottom, what?"

The other followed, unconsciously, that glance, sheer down to the rocks at the edge of the river. He looked up brightly. "Oh, I've no intention of intruding, dear boy. I just thought as I was passing that I'd drop in. It's a bit dull down below; and it can't be very exciting up here, eh? I thought you might welcome a fresh face."

"A very attractive face," a voice murmured at my elbow. It was Miss Liddicoat, whose curiosity, and perhaps the memory of that aerial



kiss, had brushed aside Greatheart's commands and had brought her close beside me.

I thrust her quickly out of the stranger's sight, but not before he had glimpsed her presence.

"It occurred to me," he said politely, "that the ladies might like a few fresh flowers to decorate their home. Would you oblige me by handing these to them with my compliments?"

I saw that there were two bouquets. The youth was a diplomat. Miss Rice would be delighted.

"Thanks," said Bisscop. "But don't trouble to come any further. If you leave them on the path, I'll deliver them for you with pleasure."

Cadwallader, with a shrug, deposited the flowers at his feet, and with a genial, "See you later. Ta-ta," carefully climbed back and descended to his camp.

It was not till he had turned his back that I ventured along the track and retrieved the flowers.

"It was thoughtful of him," Miss Rice purred as I handed over the bouquets.

"He can't be a murderer," Miss Liddicoat protested, "not with such a nice face."

They both smelled eagerly. I think two pairs of lips lightly brushed the gorgeous orchids; but it was only Miss Rice who parted the stems and glanced down for the folded note



that was not there. I had thereupon to revise my conception of the barren past of the boarding-house keeper. Some one had once sent her flowers with a word of love at their heart. How long ago?

The grocer had seen, too. He glanced glumly at me. The enemy was bringing gifts. The loyalty of the women was in danger of being sapped.

. . . . .

That night we kept strict watch. Now that the enemy knew that Bisscop, who knew their plans, had forestalled them in their search, we felt sure they would adopt more vigorous methods.

I had just lain down, after being relieved as sentry by Greatheart at midnight, when a low whistle brought me at a run to the mouth of the cave. By the starlight I saw the dark bulk of Greatheart crouched behind his rock.

"They're coming," he whispered, without turning his head. "Look out!"

Even as he spoke the figure of one of the strangers—it looked like the Italian—blocked out the stars beyond the rock.

There was a moment's pause as the other measured his distance, then with a spring he flung himself round the edge of the rock.

The grocer was ready. Braced against the cliff wall he had the attacker at a huge disadvantage. There was a cry from the man—a triumphant cry of “The grocer!”—a quick scuffle and a final shove, and the foreigner, clutching at Greatheart, hung desperately balancing on the edge of the cliff. The next moment ended it. His foothold gave way, and with a clatter of debris and a shriek he disappeared.

But the impetus of Greatheart’s effort was so great that he tottered forward, perilously lurching into space. I grabbed him just in time.

“Look out!” he gasped. “The others are coming!”

In the silence that followed the noise of the falling fragments of rock we waited breathless. But nothing happened. I peered round the point. I could just make out the other two figures braced against the cliff, and just below them, as it seemed hanging in space, there was a third figure. At first I thought that in his fall he had managed to cling to some projecting ledge; but the tense attitude of the other men furnished a more likely clue.

Their leader had saved himself from certain death by having taken the precaution of roping himself, like an Alpine climber, to the other two.

We watched them struggling to pull their leader to safety. It was a grim effort; but the suspended man at last managed to relieve the strain on the rope by finding support for his hands in some small irregularities of the cliff face.

"Let's help them," I whispered, sick with the dreadful possibilities in that struggle for life.

"By God, no!" Greatheart cried.

I knew him then. He had lost the last of his civilisation; he had relapsed into the snarling cave man whose sanctuary had been attacked by wild beasts. His clan had been menaced. Towering on the edge of the cliff in the starlight, he seemed to me all fangs and claws, the embodiment—or, rather, the resurrection—of that callous, malignant, half-man, half-brute, that in the steaming, sodden atmosphere of the earth's early ages had first raised himself on his hind legs and knew himself lord of his cousins, the beasts.

## CHAPTER XI

## THE TORTURE

AFTER all, as far as we could see, Sabini was hauled up from his precarious position without any worse injuries than a few bad bruises and the shock of his fall. And as the three, without a word for us, retraced their steps along the ledge and regained their camp, it appeared to us as a ludicrous anti-climax to a valiant emprise.

"Curious thing," Greatheart remarked, coming down into modernity with a sigh, "why they didn't use their revolvers."

"The chairman of directors has more power than we thought."

"No; I don't think that explains it," he replied. "I imagine that if it had been you, or any of the others, whom he found on guard, he would have had as little compunction at potting you as he had of shooting at Podmore. What they're after now is to get me alive. They can't

do anything without the clue, and that they know I've got, or know the place where it is hidden."

All that day we waited for a sign from the outside world; but none came. Sabini, we saw, had recovered sufficiently to take his turn at sentry-go.

But in the afternoon a new development occurred. I was idly watching the schooner, when I saw that something untoward was happening on board. I called the attention of the others to it. It looked as if some dispute had broken out on the deck. There seemed to be a struggle between the members of the native crew; out of which two natives hastily scrambled into the ship's boat lying at the stern of the vessel and almost frenziedly rowed ashore. Once on land they made straight for the camp. There they burst upon the three preparing their evening meal. An excited volley of questions and answers broke out. The next thing we saw was the departure of the man named Bibb and the youth, Cadwallader, with the natives. They rowed to the ship. For the moment it looked as if their reception at the hands of the excited crew would be hostile. But the two white men had their revolvers ready; and, cowing the natives, they climbed quickly up the ship's side, kicked the nearest of the crew and soon had them under control. About half an hour after-



wards the chairman of directors got into the boat and was rowed ashore again. Cadwallader was staying on the schooner, as a precaution against any further trouble.

"That leaves only two now," Greatheart said with a satisfied sigh.

But things were not any better for us. The provisions, despite our being put by the grocer on rations, were diminishing more quickly than we had expected. We suspected Podmore, but had no proof. Even with a further reduced ration we could not expect to hold out more than three days more. And there was no welcome break in the pitiless straight line of the horizon. Unless relief came soon we should have to capitulate—if only for the sake of the women.

"There's only one thing for it," said Greatheart, in the dismal pause that followed our overhaul of the provisions, "I'll have to get help."

"From that woman?" Miss Rice sneered.

"It's our only chance—unless the relief vessel arrives."

"But what could that creature do?"

"She could do anything," was the grocer's solemn response.

Miss Rice became enigmatic. "That's exactly what I think."

Podmore, dumbly offended at our open sus-



picion of him, offered his peevish contribution. "She's in league with them."

The grocer, deeply hurt, protested fiercely against the imputation.

"Well," said Podmore, who could so easily become nasty, "doesn't it look like it? Here these scoundrels have been on the island for days, shutting us up in the cave and firing at us—and all the time not a sign from her. Why is she lying low, unless it is that she wants to see us starved out? The whole thing is a plot between her and them. They employed her first to find out all about us; and she's done it"—he glared at Greatheart—"thanks to you. Then"—he silenced the grocer's interruption with a ponderous wave of his fat, blistered hand—"they come along, and she leaves the field to them. She was their spy. Now that she has told them all about us she skulks in the background. When they go off into the bush they go to meet her."

"How dare you?" the grocer said, rising majestically, or melodramatically, if you prefer it. But, absurd as it may seem, his anger gave him an heroic appearance. Remember, he had heard another man insult the woman he loved; he had seen all that his soul held sacred desecrated. He advanced upon Podmore.

Had we not intervened he might have

battered that mass of flaccid flesh into pulp. There was murder in his grocer's eyes. But we calmed him down with our protestations of utter belief in the lady. And Greatheart saw again his idol set up in its shrine, untarnished.

"That settles it," said he solemnly. "I will find her, and she will rescue us."

"That's impossible," I replied. "How are you going to get past the sentry?"

"There's only two of them now. They won't be able to keep so close a watch. I'll manage to escape somehow. I may be captured, of course; but it's our only chance."

I felt that the thing was impossible; and yet what else was left for us to do? By staying here we would in the end have ignominiously to capitulate. But to let Greatheart go was quite out of the question—for us. We could not run the risk of allowing the enemy to capture our captain. I felt sure that the others would agree with me. I put it confidently to them.

"The rule with us is that in all disputes the majority decides," I addressed myself specially to the women. "You know the danger of this forlorn hope. Will we let Greatheart risk his life? Will we let him go?"

To my surprise the women remained doggedly silent. The men, however, were with me. Podmore vigorously insisted on Greatheart

being prevented from deserting us for the woman. Bisscop blithely suggested that if anybody took the risk it should be a blighter like himself, whose fate wouldn't matter. "And I'd like to have a closer look at the lady," he shamelessly admitted.

I expected a protest from Miss Liddicoat. But she was absently smelling Cadwallader's bouquet.

It was Miss Rice who gave the sex's decision. "I think," she said deliberately, in a landlady's voice, "that it would be better for everybody if Mr. Greatheart went."

"That's what I say, too," Miss Liddicoat muttered.

"Then it's a tie," I said. "Three votes on each side. How are we going to settle it?"

"Toss for it." The suggestion came from Bisscop. "Only," he added, "we haven't got anything to toss with."

"Oh," said Greatheart glumly, "if the votes are even I'll stay." He turned away and went into the cave to get his sleep before his midnight watch.

Later on, the other men followed him. The two women and myself, whose duty it was to remain on guard, waited on the platform outside the cave.

"Why," I had to ask, when we were alone, "did you vote for Greatheart to go?"

Miss Rice was still the grim landlady. "Don't you see what he's after?"

Being a man I did not.

"It isn't *us* he's thinking about at all. *We* could all starve, for all he cares. The only thing he wants is to get back to that creature's arms again. He's worried over her. He doesn't know what's happened to her. He's itching to meet her again—to kiss her again—the beast! All his talk about our safety! He cares nothing—nothing for us, for any one of us. Oh, I know how it is when that sort of woman gets her arms round a man—any man. Well, let him go."

"You send him back to her?" I blindly said.

"No," Miss Rice said venomously. "He'll never reach her. They'll capture him—and—and"—her voice was near to tears—"I hope and pray they do!"

"So do I," her sister echoed forlornly.

So that was it—jealousy!

. . . . .

An hour before it was Greatheart's turn to stand guard over the cave he came quietly to my side.

"Take that," he whispered, and thrust into my hand a piece of paper. I knew at once it was the precious clue.

"Why?" I whispered back.

"It's not safe with me—after the fight."

"You're going, after all?" I had to ask, though I knew.

"Yes," he answered absently, looking up at the silent circle of hooded hills. "I must go. They might have killed her, the brutes! Or captured her and——" He shuddered. "And me waiting here, like a hen in a fowl-yard, and she calling and calling for me! Not a sign of her all these days. She must be dead—no; she cannot be dead. All the lithe, living, vibrant wonder of that woman! No; she cannot slip out of life like that. God wouldn't allow it."

"Then it's true," I said, struck by the exaltation of his language—surely never grocer spoke like that? "What Miss Rice said is true, that you're not going for our sakes?"

"You?" he said impatiently, dropping from his heights. "I never thought of you. How could I when she's in danger. But," he brightened ingenuously, "of course, it will benefit you, too. I'll bring her back. We'll rescue you. Tell Miss Rice that, won't you?"

"Don't be a fool," I said roughly. "You talk like a child, like a boy in love. How are



you going to get past the sentry at the foot of the cliff without being seen, possibly shot?"

"Man, you wouldn't stop me, would you, when she——? *Nothing* can stop me. Coward I was to wait so long. Don't you see how it all had to be, how we were led together, she and I? Our ship was wrecked, just that she and I could meet. And the raft, and the strange discoveries, isn't it plain to you how all these things have led me straight to her as if I had been swirled along in a stream? And now you say that a tiny obstacle can keep us apart. Nothing—not even death—could keep us apart."

"And there he is—Death," I said grimly, "that chap standing sentry before the fire."

"Ah, I've thought of that. I've been scheming about that ever since we've been shut up. But while there were three of them it was impossible. Otherwise. I wouldn't have funked it, for one night. But now there's only two of them; the other man is kept on the ship. To-morrow night he'll probably be back here again. So this is my only chance. When it comes to the solicitor's turn to keep watch he'll have to be awakened. Now I've noticed that he sleeps pretty soundly—any man does at two in the morning. Sabini has to go into the tent more than once to rouse him. Last night he was off



his beat for over a minute. And the minute he steps inside the tent to-night I'm off."

I saw that it was useless to attempt to dissuade him. He was in the swirl of the stream. And, on consideration, I concluded that his project had a possibility of success.

"And this?" I asked, fingering the clue.

"Take charge of it, keep it safely. Better hide it—not on yourself. They must never get hold of it. And if they overpower you, destroy it."

I promised; and we waited, watching the man below. Lit by the flames of the big fire he seemed to us something inhuman, the reincarnation of a mediæval malignity. There might have been in him some strain of the Borgias. I shuddered for Greatheart if he fell into his cruel clutches.

At last, with a quick glance in our direction, Sabini turned toward the tent. In that moment the grocer was on his feet, crouched ready for his adventure. As the Italian's figure disappeared within the tent, Greatheart was already on his way along the cliff ledge. I heard the raised voice of Sabini, rousing his sleepy companion, and the growling response of the sleep-dazed man. The moments were precious now. Greatheart had got to the end of the path and was cautiously descending the cliff. I saw him plainly in the light of the fire, his shadow pasted black against the cliff.

A dislodged stone clattered from his foot; and Greatheart, recognising now the uselessness of secrecy, sprang down the cliff. But before he reached the level Sabini was at the tent door, his revolver raised. I shouted, in the vain hope that I might distract his attention. He covered the grocer with his weapon—and staggered back.

The grocer had grabbed a large stone from the debris and hurled it straight at his opponent. It caught the Italian on the right shoulder, momentarily confusing him.

Before Sabini could steady himself to take aim, the grocer was running steadily toward the sheltering darkness of the forest.

Sabini took two steps in pursuit, raised his arm and fired.

I thought I saw Greatheart's form stagger and sway. He stopped short, then, to my immense relief, began to run again. The next instant I had lost sight of him in the shadows of the bush.

I heard the Italian's quick curse. The solicitor was behind him, fully awake. It took Sabini only a minute to explain what had happened, and then he set off in pursuit. But, after running a few steps, he turned and rushed back into the tent. A moment later he was out again, with something in his hand. I guessed that he had gone back for more cartridges.

As Sabini disappeared into the forest, the

solicitor examined his revolver, piled fresh logs on the fire and took up his position as sentry in front of it. That was all.

I wondered what was happening in the shrouded forest. Greatheart had got a start, though a small one, and he knew his way. The Italian, however, had nothing to do but to follow the noise of Greatheart's blundering footsteps. But he would go with caution. In the darkness of the jungle the grocer might easily lie in wait for him behind some big tree trunk and risk the chances of a hand-to-hand struggle. On the whole I thought that the grocer would get away safely—unless the first shot had seriously wounded him. Yet, though he had staggered, he had gone on again, as far as I could see, none the worse.

I waited uneasily, blaming myself for having let Greatheart go. No sounds, except the interminable murmurings of night in the forest, reached my anxious ears. At length I roused Podmore, whose turn it had been to relieve our leader, told him the facts and went to sleep.

. . . . .

I was wakened early next morning by the others, a-clatter with questions. I learnt that nothing had been seen of either men. This

new news was disconcerting. It might imply that Greatheart had made his escape, and that Sabini was still on his track, or that the grocer had surprised and killed his enemy and gone on.

But after breakfast we had certainty—of a painful sort. From the fringe of the bush, horror-stricken, we saw the figure of our leader emerge, followed by the Italian, revolver in hand. And as Greatheart staggered wearily into the open we saw that his right arm was roughly bandaged against his chest, attached to a piece of stick that served as a splint. And the bandages—slips torn from the bottom of Sabini's trousers—were red.

He had been wounded, either by that first shot or a later one. His escapade had ended in worse than mere failure: our leader was not only lost to us, he was helpless in the hands of his enemies.

As the piteous procession passed beneath our eyrie Greatheart bravely raised his left arm and waved to us. Sabini never raised his eyes from his quarry. And at the tent the grocer collapsed in the sand. Sabini watched him narrowly for a minute, evidently suspecting a trick; then, convinced that his man had fainted, he bent down and bound the unconscious man securely with one of the ropes from the tent. Then, helped by the other man, Sabini very thoroughly

searched the body. He was rewarded with the pocket-book.

"The clue!" Miss Rice cried. "He always carried it in his pocket-book."

"It isn't there now," I answered. "Look!"

The men examined their find eagerly. They took out the few papers it contained, scanned them carefully and flung them away. They ripped the pocket-book open without further discoveries.

"They didn't find the suspender clasp," Bisscop remarked.

"Of course not," Miss Rice enlightened him. "He gave it back to the owner. But," turning to me, "where did he put the clue?"

"I've buried it in the cave," I told her. "It's quite safe from discovery."

We watched intently for the next move of the enemy. They had confidently counted on finding the clue on Greatheart. But the rebuff only enabled us to see their determination. Sabini waited until the prostrate man had recovered consciousness, then roughly pulled him to his feet, and half-led, half-pushed him to a small tree near by. To its convenient trunk he bound him firmly and there left him. They were not going to allow him a chance of escape—that was evident. But, to our horror, we found they meant more.



What they did was obvious and simple. They prepared their breakfast—and it was a very good breakfast. They lingered over the meal, chatting languidly, and then with cigar and cigarette they reclined in the shade of the tent. That was all.

But the horror of that meal to us was their apparent unconsciousness of the presence of Greatheart. He was tied to the tree in full sight of the open-air meal. They left him tied to the tree. They did not even offer him a cup of water.

We looked at each other furtively, uneasily. We dared not speak our suspicions. There was nothing to do but wait.

All that morning the grocer was left there. The sun swung slowly higher; and the slight shade that the thin foliage afforded him was but a mockery of protection for his head. Just about midday the Italian, strolling over to see that the ropes had not worked loose, noticed that his captive, to escape the steady vertical rays of the sun, had twisted his weary body sideways to take advantage of the slight shadow cast by an overhanging bough. Sabini smiled, quickly climbed the tree, using Greatheart's sagging shoulders for foothold, and lopped off the upper boughs.

Then we dared to look directly into each

other's dreadful eyes. Sabini had determined to make the grocer open his lips and tell him where he had hidden the clue. Greatheart was on the rack. He would stay there till he confessed.

We had to look on helplessly. We were cowards, you say. We should have made some effort to rescue our leader before they killed him. But we felt sure that no torture would make Greatheart betray his secret. In our anguish we launched a dozen different and absurd schemes of rescue; but our present safety made any attempt at rescue impossible. Just as to overpower us in the cave our assailants would have to attack in single file, so if we attempted to escape we should be exposed to the same disadvantage. And the enemy were armed, and, as we had had abundant proof, were indifferent to any brutality in the achievement of their ends. Rather than let Greatheart escape they would have no hesitation in shooting us one by one as we emerged from the shelter of our rocks. And we could emerge only one by one. Rescue was impossible—at least, by daylight. At nightfall, we optimistically assured each other, there was a bare chance.

So we had to watch, with a painful fascination, the stubborn figure of the grocer, starving and sun-smitten, limply erect, bound to his stake.

At intervals, Sabini, immaculate in a clean suit of white ducks, would stroll over and inspect his victim. He would put his brief, careless question to Greatheart, and get his brief, dogged answer. Later in the afternoon, however, the grocer had nothing for his torturer but a heavy shake of his head. The muscles of his legs had given way. His body, supported only by the thin ropes that cut into his flesh, sagged like a sack of potatoes.

It was when I saw him thus that I took my determination. Nobody could be expected to obey orders when a man was tortured thus. But before I could speak Miss Rice anticipated me.

"It's only the clue they want. They'll let him go if he gives it up. You know where you've hidden it. Get it and throw it down to them."

"What's a piece of useless paper to us when they're man-handling a decent chap like that?" Bisscop growled.

I slipped into the cave, unearthed the clue and returned. I stood up from my shelter and shouted to Greatheart. He raised his head slowly.

"We give in," I shouted. "We've all determined to give in."

He understood me. He knew that I meant to give up the clue.

"No," he shouted with a strength that seemed

astounding from the limp figure of that crucified man. "Never!"

"But——" I began.

"Give up now?" he cried. "Give up after all this! Why, help is on the way now. Yes," he turned to Sabini, "help that you don't expect!"

Had he some knowledge of the woman? Or had he but an inner surety that in his extremity the woman would not fail him? We anxiously debated it.

It was Miss Rice who had the final word. "We'll wait till the night. He wishes it. He commands it. We cannot prove unfaithful to his belief in us. If he can suffer so much for so trivial a thing, we would be unfaithful to the great trust he has in us. He implores us to bear our suffering, too. It is less than his. He is our captain. If I were down there, bound to that tree, instead of him, would he not expect me to hold out? He knows best. But as soon as it is dark we will rescue him."

So I waved reassuringly to Greatheart, and he was content. We had not failed him.

Sabini and his companion had their evening meal; and at its conclusion our hopes suddenly revived. It was apparent that the solicitor was angry. Possibly he was getting uneasy for the result of Sabini's course of action. Possibly he had agreed with the Italian's diabolical sugges-

tion against his instincts. And now, plainly, he had had enough of it. They had tried torture without any effect. No good could come of continuing the experiment. The only outcome would be a useless dead man on their hands.

So, at least, we from our height interpreted that little drama. I do not know what arguments, or what pressure, Sabini used to override the other; but the end of the dispute came with the solicitor washing his hands of the whole dirty business. We could see that physical torture was not in the solicitor's little code. But Greatheart was left crucified on his tree; and the night-watch began.

With the coming of the brief twilight the tension of the women's nerves broke. They were, I believe, conscience-stricken. They had voted for him to go; and they saw now, in all its horror, the altar of jealousy to which they had dedicated their victim.

"Oh, and I sent him—to this!" Miss Rice moaned.

"No," Miss Liddicoat cried, "It was me!"

"I'd rather he'd gone to that woman's kiss," Miss Rice bravely spoke.

"Wait!" I strove to calm them. "It will soon be dark; and then we'll rescue him, the three of us."

"The five of us!" the women cried.



## CHAPTER XII

## THE SHOP

OUR plan of campaign was simple. At the first sign of slackness on the part of the enemy, we were to make our rush. I was to lead, and Podmore would follow close, with Bisscop behind. If we could get well along the path before being observed, there was a chance that one of us, at least, might be able to get to close quarters; and with the support of the other two we might win. We depended chiefly upon the darkness and the suddenness of our rush to discount the enemy's possession of fire-arms.

The weather was in our favour. The sun had set gloriously, embattled with storm clouds. The night promised either to be overcast or to end in a fierce thunderstorm.

But first I had to see to the safe-guarding of the precious clue. If anything happened to me it might never be recovered. I decided to commit the grocer's trust into the capable hands of Miss

Rice. For, of course, we had refused to let the women take part in our rash venture. Lighting one of the few remaining torches, I led her to the remote corner of the cave where I had buried the paper. I indicated the exact position of the spot I had chosen, and pointed out to her that I had smoothed and beaten down the earth to obliterate all signs of its recent disturbance.

"But is it safe here?" Miss Rice asked. "I mean, mightn't it be spoiled by the earth it's buried in—stained and perhaps rendered illegible? It's difficult enough to read it as it is."

"Oh, I thought of that. I wrapped it carefully in a piece of cloth."

"What sort of cloth?" she questioned, with the housekeeping instinct.

"Just cloth. I found a bit of some material here."

"But," she wondered, "how did a piece of cloth come here?"

"How do I know?" I impatiently answered. "I had dug the hole, and feeling about I found it on the ground. So I wrapped it up carefully and buried the parcel."

Her curiosity seemed satisfied; but after a pause she suggested that it would be as well for me to unearth the paper, so that she would be quite certain of its whereabouts when she wanted to get to it again.

It seemed a sensible suggestion. I pulled away the soft earth and lifted the precious thing.

She took it eagerly. But it was the covering that interested her.

"That's curious," she muttered, examining it by the light of the torch. "See, it glints."

It certainly did seem a curious bit of cloth.

"It's nothing that we've brought here," she said in an awed voice. "Look, it's inlaid with—  
—with silver!"

"Silver!"

We looked at each other with a surmise that strangely excited us. "It's something," I said, speaking our common thought, "left by the men who buried the treasure. Then there is a treasure. It's quite simple, after all. The men who hid the treasure must have lived somewhere; and where else is so likely a spot for a camp as this cave? That's it. They collected the stuff and buried it; and this bit of cloth wasn't valuable enough to hide. I dare say there are other fragments of their treasure left lying about even in this cave, though unfortunately anything forgotten in the forest where they buried the stuff would have soon decayed. Here anything is preserved from the weather. Goodness knows how long that bit of inlaid stuff has lain here. Well, it proves that once this cave was inhabited, and by white people."

"I wonder——?" Miss Rice said, with that blank look in the eyes that tells that the brain is busy behind them.

The torch went out.

Whatever she wondered she kept to herself. Her singed fingers took her whole attention. In the dark we wrapped the paper up once more, replaced it in its little hole, filled in the earth and smoothed and tramped it level again.

"The secret's yours now," I said, as we groped our way to the entrance of the cave.

"It will be safe with me," she answered.

On joining the group outside the cave we heard good news. Sabini, evidently exhausted by his pursuit of the night before, and urgently in need of sleep, had gone to the tent, leaving his partner to keep the first watch. But if we had looked for any relaxation of vigilance on the part of the solicitor we were disappointed. He kept the fire burning evenly, and did not allow his attention to stray for a minute from the exit of the cave. It was evident that he expected reprisals from us. And the lowering darkness of the starless sky—the storm still held off—was an added reason for watchfulness.

So we waited, growing more and more hopeless, while that little sentry did his duty with a pettifogging thoroughness. But, just when we had decided to make our rush without care for

the inevitable consequences—he had us in full view the moment we rounded the projecting point of our shelter—a curious thing happened. The solicitor, after piling some more wood on the fire, picked up a pannikin, went to the edge of the stream and filled it. As he was putting the pannikin to his lips he turned sharply. Something, some movement on the part of his prisoner, perhaps an involuntary groan, had recalled his attention to Greatheart's condition. He hesitated a moment; then, with the cup still full, he stepped softly to the door of the tent and peeped in. Evidently reassured by what he saw, he stood a minute carefully scrutinising the cliff, then quietly moved over in the direction of Greatheart.

“The dear man!” Miss Rice breathed. “He’s going to give him a drink.”

“It’s our chance!” I whispered, leaping up. “Our only chance! Come on!”

“No,” Miss Rice impulsively cried. “If you disturb that man, Mr. Greatheart won’t get the water. And he’s dying.”

“But it is just to keep him alive so that he can be tortured all over again to-morrow; and I’m not going to stand the chance of that,” Bisscop fiercely answered. “I’m ready.”

He pushed her aside. Podmore, rising un-



willingly, came between us. The adventure was to begin.

I crept quietly to the ledge, followed by the two men.

The solicitor, on his errand of mercy, had forgotten us. He had, we guessed, found the grocer sunk in a stupor of exhaustion, and was attempting to force the water through his closed lips. Certainly he was so busy in his effort to revive his captive that we had some moments to ourselves. I reached the end of the cliff track, and was already beginning my cautious descent down the rock when, surprised at not hearing the others close behind me, I glanced back. In the light of the fire I saw two blobs of black against the cliff wall. Podmore had funkcd. He crouched, a grotesque shadow, in the middle of the path, while behind him Bisscop was pushing him on. The fat man's fear held him motionless; and the narrowness of the ledge prevented Bisscop from passing him. Had Podmore been a thin man the whole of our fortunes might have been altered. Mere fat was the absurd obstacle.

There was nothing else to do but to go on alone. There was no time to go back and help the others. I descended the cliff with extreme care, and got to the sloping debris at its foot without discovery.

Then a curse rang out, echoing from the cliff.

Etched by the light of the fire against the black opening of the tent stood Sabini, amazed. For a moment I thought the last of our chances had gone; but his gaze was upwards, attracted by those black blots on the face of the precipice. The fire was luckily between him and me.

He fired. I heard a scream of agony, or fear, from Podmore; and then the sound of a quick scuffle. Sabini fired again and a third time. Then there was silence.

I had not time to discover whether Podmore or Bisscop, or both, had been killed. For, without attracting the Italian's notice, I had slipped past the tent, out of his sight; and, before the last shot had echoed away into the forest, I was safe, deep within the jungle.

I had escaped. But what to do? I knew that now the alarm had been raised there was no possibility for me single-handed to rescue Great-heart. I hung round miserably for a while—and then my great inspiration came to me. I would leave the grocer in the enemy's hands and find the woman.

I see now that this was merely the most obvious thing to do; but it shows how incompetent we were in the face of unforeseen difficulties that, in all our discussions for the rescue of our leader, no one had suggested trying to get reinforcements from the mysterious woman. Yet the

idea must have occurred to the women ; but they did not mention it. I think I can understand why.

Now, my resolution taken, I wasted not a moment. Even in the thick blackness of the bush I easily found my way to the beach, and, after waiting some time listening vainly for any sound of pursuit, with an exultant heart I ran down the level sands. I had a great confidence that I should find the woman and that her wit would solve all our difficulties. That hope was merely the reaction from my long confinement in the cave, the joy that thrilled me as once again I felt the spring in my muscles.

Of how in the darkness I found the glade where Greatheart had met the girl, and the track that he had taken with her through the sparser bush inland, of how, in the dark, I even stumbled upon one of the easy chairs mentioned by the grocer, of how and with what difficulties and discouragements I struggled on till the sudden coming of the dawn, it is not necessary for me here to retail. For me it was a night of eternity during which I struggled desperately through the chaos of a nightmare.

Dazed and exhausted, I remember toiling up a sharp ascent, and as I topped the ridge I met the straight stare of the risen sun. I hailed the life-giver with exultation. I did not know how far

I had come ; but I saw that in the darkness I had followed the track—a track made like the strange one to the peak, as if beaten down by an army of marching men.

But I could not go on. I had to fling myself down for the few minutes' rest that every spent muscle in my body craved.

. . . . .

How long I traitorously slept I do not know ; but I woke with an uneasy start, with the same feeling that used to come to me when I had overslept and knew that I should be late at the office. I opened my tired eyes, still with the sun smiting them, upon a fantastic dream.

Advancing slowly toward me through the glade came a tiger. Behind it rose up the clumsy bulk of a huge grey elephant, gorgeously caparisoned in scarlet. And seated on this moving mountain, as if on an Eastern throne, was the slim, strange, beautiful, fantastically arrayed figure of the unknown girl!

Straight along the rays of the level sun they came to me, moving from one dream into another. The woman, haloed by the sun's blinding disc, seemed to me some pagan goddess descending in dreadful majesty to earth. A mad impulse swept over me to bow my head beneath this radiant splendour. But a moment

later the great bulk of the elephant obscured the sun, and the goddess took the humility of human shape. I waited speechless and staring as they solemnly moved up the slope, and, at some signal from the girl, paused before me. The tiger crept, like a great dog, to heel, whining. The elephant towered over me. And the girl, throned high on its broad neck, looked down on me with a long, considering gaze. And then I became aware of an unexpected frailty in her slim figure and pale face. So we stood silent, while what had been before only a blurred picture took shape to me, and while she, no doubt, revolved in her mind the meaning of my unexpected appearance.

The elephant bore on its back a tiny howdah of crimson—it seemed to me to be of velvet inlaid with silver, and its trappings were of leather richly dyed in sunset hues. The woman—I saw now that she was a mere girl—was clad in a shining cuirass of silver chain-work, so moulded to her figure that it gave the effect of a skin of silver scales. Slim and indescribably supple she was, her breasts almost boyish in their youthful salience. Images to describe her flooded my excited brain. She had the slight, curving beauty of the young moon, the bending lissomness of a sapling eucalypt, the long-



petalled grace of a flannel flower. Her head was swathed in a turban of rich scarlet, jewelled with I know not what magnificence of gems, framing a face that startled me by its utter lack of Eastern contour. I had expected a princess of the Orient, some tawny queen; I saw the face of an Australian girl, paler than the hue of a surf-bather.

Her skirt was a lacy thing of grey, and as she bestrode the elephant's neck I saw her boyish legs. Her stockings were of grey silk, and on her narrow feet were little flat-soled shoes of silver. And in her belt were grotesquely stuck two serviceable revolvers, and in her hand she held a steel javelin.

"Why did you come?" she asked at last, sweeping me with her narrow eyes.

I blurted out my story. She listened with a slowly freezing horror on her face.

"Torturing him!" she broke out. "Torturing him now! And I was coming to him. Quick!"

She said a word to the elephant. It sank clumsily to its knees. She put out a little, capable hand and helped me to climb to the gaily decorated howdah. Then the march began, the tiger gambolling ahead, the girl guiding and hastening the elephant's slow progress, I uncomfortably rocking on the cushioned

seat of my cage. A strange procession we must have seemed. I could not help happily wondering what effect it would have on Sabini and Mr. Solicitor Bibb.

"You wonder why I didn't know?" the girl challenged me at last. "I've been ill, very ill, ever since I met him. But I never guessed that he was in trouble; and I knew he would come for me in the end. But this morning I found myself well again, and I threw aside my pride—my longing was too great—and set out to meet him. Strangers on my island! I do not allow strangers on my island!"

She said it with her regal air, her brow straight with decision. And yet she looked so young.

"You allowed *us*," I said.

"Yes, because he was with you. But even you I was going to send away."

"Why?"

"Because I do not need you."

"We were only too anxious to go," I explained somewhat hotly. Now that I sat above her, I saw in her no strange goddess, but only a beautiful, wilful girl. "And," I added, "without me what would you have known?"

"Yes," she admitted without discomposure, "you were very useful. But I think you were asleep, weren't you?"

I admitted my lapse.

"Ah, but," she said, with a glance of sympathy from her long, narrow eyes, "you had been all night struggling through the bush. I'm sorry I said that. But your news is so terrible. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

I did not wonder any longer about Great-heart's fascination. I did not wonder even about mine.

"They can't kill him before we get there, can they?" she broke out anxiously. "No; that would be impossible. He is too great a man to be killed by such scum."

"I think he is the greatest man I've ever met," I said.

"Yes, I know," she almost snapped. She did not need the assurance of any outsider.

Then there was a long spell of silence, while the elephant methodically threaded its way along the winding track. You cannot hurry elephants; but I knew that she was chafing at the slowness of our progress. But no elephant can keep up with a woman's thoughts when they run ahead to her beloved. I roused myself, for the motion of the howdah was lulling me, already exhausted by lack of sleep, into a dangerous drowsiness. Soon I should need all my wits. I determined to make her speak, to make her forget, perhaps, the thing that was being done to her lover.

"Who are you?" I asked. "And what are you doing here?"

"I'll tell you," she answered eagerly, glad to interrupt with speech the dreadful imaginings of her silence. "But didn't he tell you?"

"He could tell me nothing."

"No; now I remember he did not ask me anything about myself. And there was no need. It was not necessary. I was there, and he had come to me. That night! That silver magical night!"

Her lips—even to a tired sub-editor, most kissable lips—seemed to savour that magic again. I waited till the remembering look had died in her softened eyes. Then, with a resentful sigh, she came back to the prosaic day.

"I was shipwrecked here—like you—about six months before you came, you must have heard of the *Oxford*, wrecked about here?"

My sub-editorial memory leapt back to a series of telegrams from Darwin, first that the *Oxford* was overdue, then that wreckage had been discovered, and at last that vessels were detailed to search. But nothing was found except more wreckage. It was ultimately concluded that the vessel had gone down with all hands in the height of a big monsoon. No survivors, nor any evidence of them, were ever discovered. There was something else about

the *Oxford* that I could not recall—some detail about the nature of her cargo.

I told the girl what I knew. "But they made a thorough search and there were no survivors."

"There were three survivors."

"And the other two died?" I asked.

"Oh no; they're here." She pointed to the tiger and lightly tickled the elephant's leathery ear.

"Ah," I said, "now I remember. The *Oxford* was carrying a big consignment of wild animals."

"Yes; it was a circus ship. We were coming down from Singapore with a lot of animals for Furth's Australian Circus. Animals in cages for the menagerie, you know. We struck a rock one night in a big storm and went to pieces before the boats could be launched. As soon as I guessed we had no hope I collared my mother's keys and opened all the animals' cages I could reach in the time. I determined that the poor things should have their chance along with us. I don't know how it happened, but when I was washed overboard the first thing I saw was the elephant wading ashore. You see, the water was deep enough to drown us, but not an elephant. I hung on to his tail. It was quite easy, like being towed ashore. And when he dragged me up on the beach I let go, and



something big and wet came up to me and licked my face. It was the tiger—*my* tiger. You see, it felt lonely and frightened on the island by itself. It had never been outside of its cage before. It seemed to know that something was wrong when there were no bars in front of it; and it was glad to find a familiar face. It had been born in a cage, and so had its mother before it. I had been training him for a month. Mother had given him to me for a pet.”

“But,” I said, with an apprehensive glance at the barred beautiful thing sniffing the air before us, “what do you want with pets that size?”

“It’s my profession,” she smiled. “Mother was a lion-tamer for Furth’s Circus. Didn’t you ever see her big act with six lions in the cage at the same time? It was the biggest draw Furth’s ever had. But mother was ambitious. Lions are stupid beasts; what she wanted was to do an act with a whole menagerie of all kinds of wild animals. And as she was rather run down after her year with the lions—she had a nervous breakdown after that night in Ballarat when one lion had indigestion and mauled her, and she had to shoot him—the boss gave her this sea trip to Burmah for a rest. And, of course, she took me with her. And now,” she sighed, “she’s drowned with the rest of them.”

I waited till she should speak again.

“Poor mother,” she murmured. “But none of us in our profession ever expect to qualify for our old age pension. Animal training is a risky game. A little thing like indigestion or toothache worries them, and then you’ve got to look out. But it’s exciting, and the feeling of mastery—oh, I can’t describe it! It was that that attracted me. I used to enjoy mother’s acts as much as anybody in front. I was born in the circus—when Furth’s was a little one-wagon, one-tent concern in the Australian backblocks, mooching along from one up-country show to another with one-night stands whenever we sighted a pub. Why, I was helping in the acrobatic turns—being thrown by my uncle from one trapeze to my brother on another, and being twirled round and round on my uncle’s legs—almost as soon as I could walk. But, even as a child, the animals used to fascinate me. They always liked me, too. Mother used to take me into the cages with her when she was rehearsing, and let me pat the lions. Lions are lovely things to pat—they love being teased and are always ready for games. But I like tigers better. You can stroke a tiger’s fur the wrong way and hear him purr. Why, the minute I saw him, I took a fancy to Fido.”

“To who?” I asked, startled out of grammar.

“Fido!” she smiled, pointing to the great

striped beast loping along at the elephant's feet. "He was only a cub then, and so playful. He's quite a baby still."

"But he looks such a nasty-tempered brute," I said.

"Oh, it's part of his training to make him look fierce. The public like it."

"Still," I objected, "even if his mother was born in captivity, what is to prevent him remembering some day his grandmother who wasn't born in a cage?"

"Animals do," she conceded. "That's what we've always to be on the look out for; but, really, it's usually indigestion. There's always some risk, of course, but"—her glance dwelt tenderly on the tiger—"not Fido!"

"But how did you manage on the island by yourself?" I asked, remembering our difficulties.

"Not by myself," she reminded me. "I had Fido and Peter." She touched the great sagging flap of the elephant's ear. "Peter was such a help. Oh, we got on all right. When the ship broke up, heaps and heaps of wreckage drifted ashore. Dead bodies, too—I was burying them for days—men and animals. I didn't care to put temptation in Fido's way. Curious thing, I never set eyes on the hippopotamus—and you know hippopotamuses can swim. I expect the salt water killed the poor dear. Oh,

I've always been able to look after myself. Had to, in my profession. I made a camp over there—Peter was such a help in lugging things about for me—and Fido, of course, was company."

"But how did you feed them?"

"Elephants don't need to be fed—not when they can breakfast on a tree or two. And, luckily for Fido, I found case after case of bully-beef—you know, soldiers' rations—among the wreckage on the beach. I've got a whole shed full of it over at the camp. Such a lot of useful things came ashore—the whole ship must have broken up. I even got a gramophone. I fixed it up in the bush just above my camp; and whenever I felt lonely all I had to do was to wind it up and play——"

"'Lohengrin'!" I cried, a light breaking in on me.

"How did you know?"

"Some of us heard it. We thought it was a brass band."

"So it was. A lovely record, wasn't it? Some of the other records were spoiled by the salt water."

"But we thought there was really a brass band here."

"On my island?" she laughed. "It must be a better record than I thought."

"And why," I asked boldly, determined to get

at the bottom of the mysteries, "do you wear these clothes?"

"Well," she shot a look at me, "why do you wear those? Exactly," she answered for me, "because you haven't got any others. That's the case with me. The few things I got ashore in were worn out months ago; but luckily I saw the trunk containing my professional clothes stranded in the shallows, and Peter fetched it in for me—hardly damaged at all. I saved them; and at last there was nothing for me to do but make shift with them. And this morning I put on my smartest dress, and Peter's most swagger harness, because I was going to meet *him*. Any girl would. And," she looked eagerly ahead, "in another half-hour we'll be there!"

In the tense silence that followed, for the girl's imagination had flown eagerly ahead to her lover, I pieced together the missing parts of the other puzzles of the island. That strange track, for instance, made by some gigantic force through the forest to the peak, was made by the elephant, carrying the ship's spar on its back. But here I came to a dead end.

"Why did you cut the flagpole down after erecting it on the peak?" I asked.

"Because I didn't want it up. It was too conspicuous. People might notice it."

"You didn't want to be rescued?"



“Oh, yes, I did—at first. I cried and cried, first for poor mother and then at my loneliness. There were whole days when I wouldn’t speak a word to Peter or Fido. Then I determined to get back to Australia. I made Peter take that spar to the top of the mountain and built two bonfires, one up there and one down by my camp. But then—I don’t know how it happened—I began to get more contented. I liked the life. I had plenty of provisions, and could get plenty more; and I had made myself pretty comfortable. Why, I’ve got easy chairs like those”—she pointed to the two seats by the track that I had found in the night—“all over the island, in my favourite spots. There must have been a huge cargo of them on board.”

“Then one day I made up my mind. I had everything I wanted. I had had a hard life—circus life isn’t all spangles—I was my own mistress. I could do as I liked. And I owned an island of my own. So I cut down that flag-staff and decided to stay where I was.”

“But your people at home, your ties? Weren’t there relations or friends that you would have liked to see again?”

“Oh, yes. There were times—in the evenings when there was a big moon—when I almost cried to go back, even though mother was dead. But Peter was always kind and comfortable, and

Fido was always ready for some rough and tumble fun. But on those moonlight nights I've wished my heart out to be back, just for a day, to be back in old Woolloomooloo."

"Back where?" I gasped, almost falling from the howdah.

"Woolloomooloo. It's part of Sydney. Don't you know it? That's where my married sister lives. She married a bus-driver—he's a cabman now. She's got two of the duckiest kids—such tricks!—I ever saw. Funnier than tiger cubs, though you've got to handle 'em more carefully. They're so easy to break, so soft; and they bump so easily. I used always to stay at Flo's place when the circus was laid up or in Sydney. And, one year, when I was only a kid, I had a bad fall practising—uncle let me drop—and I broke my ankle. It took a long time to mend, so I stayed at Flo's all that year. I loved that life after the hard work of the circus. And circus life is so dull, isn't it? Practising all the day and being moved on. So, after the circus, I found life in Woolloomooloo wildly exciting. I used to play with the other kids in the streets; we used to make up great games, and I trained some of 'em to do some of my easiest tricks. And then there were all the shop-windows to look in and pick out the things you'd buy if you had a million pounds. But

there was one shop I liked best of all. You didn't need a million pounds for it. You just went in and asked the grocer for a lolly, and he'd give you a bag full. At least, he always used to give 'em to me. The other girls would send me in to get lollies for them. He was such a dear little grocer."

"What was the name of the shop?" I asked eagerly. "I know Woolloomooloo pretty well."

"Oh, we just called it the grocer's shop. Let me see. It stood at a corner. Great—Great-head—no. Ah, Greatheart! That's his name. I was very fond of him. If ever I do get back to Woolloomooloo the first thing I'll do, after I've kissed the kids, will be to take them round to that grocer's and buy lollies for them. And I'll tell the grocer who I am. But," she sighed, "I'll never go back now."

"Listen!" she cried a moment after. "Can't you hear the surf? The beach is just beyond that ridge. Oh, pray God, we're in time!"

## CHAPTER XIII

## THE GROCER

OUR arrival at the field of combat was dramatic enough for the last act of a melodrama.

Before we entered the scrub from the beach the girl, who had handed me one of her loaded revolvers, pointed back to the schooner at anchor.

"They've seen us," she exclaimed. "We'll have to be quick, or else there'll be more to fight. Look! They're putting off in a boat!"

Indeed, if the sight of a procession of a tiger and an elephant carrying a couple of figures startled the observers on the vessel, our stately entrance from the scrub toward the camp must have struck dismay into the hearts of such men as Sabini and Bibb.

The two men were at their midday meal. My first glance was for Greatheart. He was still bound to his tree; but there was no movement in that limp figure to tell us whether he

was still alive. The two men were not eating ; they had the suspended attitude of men startled by some inexplicable sound. They had heard the crashing noise of the elephant's clumsy progress through the bush. As they caught sight of us they sprang to their feet, amazed, and in the case, at least, of Bibb, terror-stricken.

In a flash Sabini had whipped out his revolver and fired at the tiger. The shot must have grazed the animal, for with a snarl of rage it leapt.

The girl screamed a sharp command ; but the tiger, maddened by its wound, had forgotten the lessons of its lifelong captivity. It was once again a wild animal, thirsting for the blood of its ancestral enemy. Sabini fired blindly again, missed the beast, and then, with a cry of despair, turned to run.

Then things happened in a heap. The elephant lumbered forward, and I saw Bibb, almost paralysed by fright, fire point blank. From my height it looked like a man firing at an avalanche. Certainly the bullet had as much effect. Then, flinging away his futile revolver, he dodged behind the tent and disappeared. And at that moment the tiger leapt and brought the flying Italian softly down to earth as one would catch a floating ball of thistledown. For a moment I had a glimpse of the animal above



the prostrate, wriggling body, stroking it and cuffing it into quietness as a cat plays with a fluttering bird. Then I remembered the boat from the schooner and the disappearance of the solicitor.

I slipped down from the elephant—it was like sliding off the roof of a house—and took the shortest route for the beach. I heard the solicitor ahead of me crashing in his blind fear through the undergrowth. When I broke out from the scrub I saw him well ahead of me, running with a fleetness that in so little and so old a man amazed me. But if fear sped his feet the goal ahead gave him wings.

For there, close to the beach, I saw the boat from the schooner, being rowed by two natives, with Cadwallader at the rudder. The sight of the escaping Bibb and me in hot pursuit made the youth stimulate the oarsmen's efforts; and before I could reach my quarry the boat was almost beached.

With a last, desperate effort, the solicitor waded through the shallows and was pulled hurriedly on board, gasping his astonishing news. Cadwallader proved himself quick in action. He gave his order, and the boat swung round and was twenty yards from the shore before I pulled up, panting.

"What the hell's the row?" Cadwallader shouted.

"Only that you've got notice to quit," I replied, keeping a careful look out for any attempt on his part to "pot" me.

"Where's Sabini?"

"The tiger got him." It was Bibb who volunteered this information. "A ferocious tiger, eating him, my God!"

"Dead?" Cadwallader asked.

"Expect so," I answered.

"Well," he said instantly, "if there's the remotest chance of him being alive I'm coming back to find out."

He turned to the oarsmen, but Bibb intervened.

"He's dead," the solicitor cried. "If you go back they'll kill you, too. They'll kill us all. They've got a tiger and an elephant and a—devil!"

"All the same," Cadwallader retorted, "I'm not going to leave Sabini, dead or alive, in their clutches—murderous brutes!"

"If you make the slightest attempt to approach," I warned him, with my revolver ready, "I'll fire."

He debated a long minute with himself; and at last looked up with a laugh. He knew that, firing from a rocking boat, he would be at a cruel

disadvantage with an armed man on shore, and that in an attempt to beach the boat I could easily account for the lot of them.

"All right," he called, with a valiant attempt at unconcern. "You're on top just now; but—*look out!*"

To Bibb's blubbering relief he gave the order to return to the schooner. I stood and watched the boat till I saw its occupant clamber on board the ship. Then, tired out, I returned to the camp.

. . . . .

The first thing I saw as I emerged from the scrub was the elephant, at his ease, making a light meal off the tree tops. There was no sign of the tiger. Stretched in front of the tent, where he had been struck down, lay the body of the Italian, dead. The tiger had mauled him dreadfully. And, bending over the limp, huddled figure of Greatheart, was the girl, in tense agony, without a sob.

I ran up to her. She was trying to force him to drink from a pannikin of water. His livid lips were tightly shut. I hurried back to the tent, avoiding looking at the dreadful figure of Sabini, ransacked the tent stores and discovered what I had sought—a bottle of whisky. Between the girl and myself we got the grocer's mouth

open and poured the stimulant down it. A slight quiver of the muscles was our reward.

We watched in silence. At last we saw Greatheart open his bloodshot eyes. His vacant gaze wandered over our faces without recognition; and then a spark of intelligence came into his eyes. He remembered the girl. He strove to say something. The parched lips moved; that was all. But the girl, on her knees, bent down and kissed him with lips that seemed by their youthful vitality to challenge the grim beckoning of Death. And Greatheart, with a tired child's sigh, sank back to unconsciousness pillowed by the woman's strong arm.

"He's only exhausted," I said. "He's on the mend now."

"Look how his poor flesh is cut by those cruel ropes," she murmured, infinitely tender. Then, with a cruel twitch of her lips that shocked me, "The beasts! I'm glad that the tiger killed him; but, oh, if Fido had not been so quick about it! I didn't want that fiend killed just yet. He was lucky!"

A shadow fell athwart us. I looked up and found, to my relief, that it was only Bisscop standing over us. But behind him, all silent at gaze, stood a flabby Podmore and two apprehensive women.

"I say," cried Bisscop ecstatically, "it was a

ripping fight, what? Never saw such a clean-up in one round in my bally life."

"But what's become of the tiger?" Podmore asked uneasily, glancing fearfully round.

"He slipped away into the bush," the girl glanced up to say. "I drove him off the body; and I dare say he was tired and has gone to have a sleep."

"Oh, and our poor Mr. Greatheart!" Miss Rice cried, on her knees beside the prostrate man.

"Don't you touch him!" the girl hissed.

The two women struck at each other with their fierce, jealous eyes across the body—vindictive rapier strokes of glances—and then Miss Rice rose dazedly to her feet, like a whipped dog.

The girl had forgotten her rival. She was leaning close to the man's face now, crooning a kind of baby-talk into his heedless ears. It hurt me to hear such mother-intimacy.

And in the silence that followed a woman's scream rang out. It was Miss Liddicoat.

In an instant the girl, her eyes blazing, had leapt to her feet. And yet I noticed how gently she had removed her arm from Greatheart's head.

"How dare you, you——!" she whispered. "You'll disturb him."



Miss Liddicoat shuddered, clutched the quailing Podmore and pointed, with averted eyes.

Out of the shadows of the jungle came slinking the great barred tiger. But Miss Liddicoat had nothing to be afraid of now. The tiger was the incarnation of a penitent cat caught stealing the milk. He had had time, there in the bush, with the memory of his mistress's angry face, to reflect on his sins. He came anxiously toward our group, cringing and imploring pardon in every meek curve of his body.

The girl stepped out to meet him. And as the animal, divided between fear and love for his mistress, came fawning up to her she looked him straight in his wavering, pitiable eyes. The tiger read the message there. He whined piteously, imploringly. He would have turned to slink off again with his shame, but he dared not take his eyes from her face. He paused, one conciliatory paw half-raised.

Deliberately the girl shot her pet behind the ear—and leapt swiftly to one side to escape the beast's last convulsive spring. It sank to earth and crumpled over, with a final lash of its great striped tail.

For one instant the girl looked down on the tremendous chaos she had wrought; in the next she was on the body, sobbing heart-brokenly, her weak hands feebly stroking his beautiful fur.

We left her there with her pet.

And at last she came to us, wiping with a weak hand the tears from her eyes. And she had shed no tear over the unconscious form of the grocer.

"Poor Fido," she said, "I had to do it. He had tasted blood; he had found out how easy it was to kill a man. I should never have been sure of him afterwards. He remembered——" She turned to me. "You were right; he remembered his ancestors. I had no choice. He had got out of hand once. He would never forget that. And he came, sorrowful and penitent, to take his whipping! Poor Fido, he did not suffer long. But that last pleading look in his eyes. He knew then. And the paw he put out for the handshake! That was the first trick I taught him, when he was a tiny baby."

. . . . .

We men had a double task to do that afternoon, while the girl, snarling like a cat if any of us came near her, tended the sick man. We sent the women away on the pretext of keeping a watch over the schooner, and buried the torn body of Sabini in one grave and that of his slayer in another. And the women, returning, having guessed our intent, brought with them white flowers with which they strewed the grave

of our enemy. When she saw this, the girl, committing the still unconscious Greatheart to my care, went swiftly into the jungle and returned with her arms full of pale blossoms, which she heaped defiantly above the grave of the tiger.

Then she took up her watch over Greatheart. He was sunk in a deep stupor of exhaustion, from which the girl and I woke him at intervals to force through his lips tiny portions of nourishment. Miss Rice hovered wistfully in the background—a mother cruelly deprived of her babe.

Toward evening he showed signs of waking, and began to mutter in his sleep. At first his disjointed ravings were unintelligible; but soon I recognised some coherency in his words. And I listened, absurdly shamefacedly, while the unconscious man bared his grocer's soul.

“And the next, madam? I can recommend that brand of pickles. Use 'em myself. A penny cheaper than the old brand you've been complaining about. . . . Any candles, miss, or soap? We've got a new washing soap. Saves all the rubbing of the clothes. Will you try a bar? . . . Tea? One and sixpence. . . . Charge it up, miss? Very well, but tell your mother the account for last month is still due. . . . Out of work, is he? Well, well. . . . And the next, madam? . . . Honey-balls,

little girl? There, there, never mind the penny. Keep it for a toy. But don't you go telling the other kiddies, or I'll be bankrupt. It's only because your face is so clean. Now, now, run away. . . . Sorry, sir, but your order has been overlooked. Should have gone out on the cart, yesterday's delivery. I've spoken severely to the lad. What's that? I couldn't speak severely to anyone, eh? You just ask my wife! . . . Eggs bad, madam? Impossible. Oh, you've got one there to show me. Phew! No; don't leave it on the counter. I shan't charge you for that dozen. . . . Bacon stringy? Never had a complaint about our bacon before. Bacon needs careful cooking, that's all. . . . We do our best, madam, but accidents will happen, won't they? And this hot weather is so trying for butter, isn't it? And there's a drought on the South Coast, and we have to pay an extra penny a pound. But, at the price, you won't get better butter in a city shop. And the next, miss? . . ."

In his delirium Greatheart had relapsed into the grocer. His voice had the cringing suavity that belongs behind the counter. We listened sorrowfully. But I had a deeper anxiety. Did the girl recognise in the stricken form of her lover the grocer in Woolloomooloo who had given a little girl lollies for nothing?

I need not have worried. She took these mutterings of his as the ravings of a man distraught. She could never see the grocer in him; she loved him.

Miss Rice, by this time a raving fury, had no qualms. The girl had torn Greatheart from her. No mercy would be shown.

"Fancy," she said loudly, "the poor man remembering that he is——"

It was Greatheart who prevented the disclosure. He opened his eyes wide—and they were the eyes of a sane man, without a hint of the grocer.

"You!" he gladly sighed, as he saw the girl.

She bent down and kissed him on the lips, shamelessly, daring us, with a flashing look, to blame her. I didn't—nor do I think Miss Rice did. The boarding-house keeper turned desolately away. She admitted defeat.

The girl soothed the man with a gesture that was all motherly. "Hush, dearest, you've been very ill."

"And the clue?" he muttered eagerly. "It's safe. They didn't get it."

"I've hidden it safe," I assured him.

"Ah, that's good," he murmured, and with the suddenness of the invalid he relapsed into sleep. This time, as we anxiously watched, we saw that



it was a sound and natural sleep. Greatheart would recover.

As, in Greatheart's condition, it was impossible to remove him to the safety of the cave, we took possession of the tents and installed him there. The girl refused to allow anybody but herself to tend him, despite a valiant challenge from Miss Rice. The girl merely fingered her revolver. She was like a wild animal over her cub.

Of course, the position we occupied in the camp was open to attack. And the schooner still held the possibilities of trouble. Bibb's fright might not prove lasting; and Cadwallader was of a sturdier build. So, after the return of the women, I had posted Bisscop on the beach to warn us of any attempt at a landing.

Before sunset I visited him. The schooner was still there; but already it showed signs of departure. They were getting up the anchor; and though there was little breeze, and that dying, I saw they meant to go out under the power of their auxiliary engine. I sent Podmore to take the first watch, with instructions to fire two shots if he saw any suspicious signs from the ship. Our plan was for the whole of our company to sleep at the camp, the men in the open, Greatheart and his nurse in one tent, and Miss Rice and Miss Liddicoat in the other.

But I had forgotten the vindictiveness of

Miss Rice. She promptly refused to stay in the neighbourhood of "that creature." She said she would feel contaminated. With a spitfire sort of pride she announced her intention of removing herself and her fierce respectability to the shelter of the cave. Miss Liddicoat immediately offered to accompany her.

I readily assented. With two jealous women, one carrying a revolver, I saw there was likely to be trouble. And the affront of the boarding-house keeper's withdrawal was quite lost on the girl.

When I mentioned it to her, she merely said, "If that old thing had attempted to fuss about him, I'd have shot her. I shot Fido for less."

About ten o'clock Bisscop relieved Podmore on watch at the beach. Podmore reported that the schooner had left an hour after sundown, and that by this time her lights were almost out of sight. She had headed straight away from the island. Some hours after midnight I relieved Bisscop. He had no news to give, except that the ship was out of sight.

I took up my watch, fighting strongly against sleep. But nothing happened till just before the long looked for dawn.

There was a hail from the beach. "Don't shoot!" a man's voice shouted.

"Stay where you are," I called. "If you approach, I'll fire."

"I could have potted you hours ago," the man shouted.

"Who are you?"

"Cadwallader."

That moment the sudden tropic dawn came. I made out a dim, dark blotch on the sands. I levelled my revolver.

"If I fire, or if you fire, you'll have the whole camp on you," I warned him. "Wait there."

He remained motionless till the growing light enabled me to make him out clearly. Then I approached him cautiously, looking for signs of Bibb or the others of the crew. He stood alone. There was no sign of a boat.

"What are you doing here, after my warning?" I asked.

"Swam ashore just before the schooner left," was his quiet reply. "I'm full up of that crowd. The native crew played up three days ago; and I've been kept cooped up on board all the time to watch them, while Bibb and Sabini had all the fun ashore. And when Bibb got the blue funks I decided to chuck him. He's a fool and a coward. And Sabini's dead. So the board of directors has been dissolved; and I've come along to throw in my lot with your crowd. As a crowd you're all right."

"You want the treasure?" I challenged him.

"No," he frankly smiled. "I want the fun. I want to stretch my legs after those three days on the palatial liner. The treasure? I don't believe there ever *was* any treasure. Do you, frankly now? It's a fool's errand we've both been sent on. No; I resign my claim to the treasure. I like your crowd. There's a man or two among you—and, except that Italian, I haven't seen a man for months. And you've got some charming ladies with you. I've not had a chat with a lady for—oh, years. Well?"

"Well?" I had to smile at his youthful ingenuousness. "But how do I know this isn't a trick?" I asked. "And how do I know that the ship won't return with reinforcements?"

"Bibb won't return. He's scared to death—says he didn't come out all this way to be pursued by tigers and elephants and devils. He'll never stop running till he's safe in his office again, and then he'll bolt the door. Look here, now Sabini's wiped out we haven't a hope of beating you, have we, straight? You're in possession; you're well armed; and you've got that girl and her tiger and her elephant, and the clue—what chance have I?"

"No," I reflected. "And, as you said, if you had wanted to shoot me during the night you had a pretty good chance. But, if I accept you

as a recruit, you clearly understand that you give up all claim to the treasure?"

"Oh, take your treasure—if you ever find it—if it's there to find!"

"If you assist us to discover it," I laid down my terms, "you'll share equally with all the rest."

It had occurred to me that he might be of assistance in piecing together the meaning of the clue. Even a hint from him might put us on the track. Cadwallader did not know how valuable he might be to us.

"Anyhow," he said, waiting anxiously for my next move, "you can't let me starve, can you?"

"You let Greatheart starve—deliberately."

"No?" he asked in innocent surprise. "Did that devil do that?"

"Didn't you know? You *must* have known."

"How could I? I've been stuck on the ship ever since they got Greatheart. What the board of directors—the full board—had decided upon was to get hold of the grocer chap without hurting him, and to keep him a close prisoner till he handed over the clue, or till the rest of you handed it over. But starving him? Deliberately, you say? Bibb wouldn't have allowed that. And, of course, I wouldn't have."

"Unfortunately," I said, "Bibb and you weren't asked."

"You mean to say that Sabini did it off his



own bat—tortured him without Bibb knowing?”

“Bibb knew; but he could do nothing against that fiend. And Bibb tried to give him a drink of water last night.”

“No water, either? The brute! It’s torture. But I’m glad Bibb tried to help him. When I got our chairman on board the schooner he jabbered something about Sabini tying the grocer up to a tree; but I thought that was merely to keep him from escaping. . But starving him! I say, that’s hardly cricket, is it?”

Looking at the frank countenance of the boy, genuinely distressed at my disclosure, I could not disbelieve him. The lad was decent. He was not to blame for the company he had kept. Probably Sabini had purposely kept him in ignorance of his methods, relying on his power over the meek and ineffectual Bibb.

“I’m glad that beast Sabini is dead,” he said at length. “Never did like the way he did things. It was all due to his overbearing ways, and his partiality for flourishing his revolver, that the crew of the schooner played up. Once I went on board it was easy to manage them. And this chap Greatheart, he’s O.K. again?”

“He’s recovering; but it was touch and go.”

“Great general, that chap. Sort of Napoleon, eh?”

Cadwallader offered me his revolver, and sug-

gested that I should search him. But I refrained from subjecting him to that indignity. He was damp from his swim and his night on the beach.

Together we returned to the camp, where I explained the mystery of his appearance and the terms on which I had admitted him to our company.

"Oh, poor boy!" Miss Liddicoat murmured. "He's all wet!"

"And hungry," Cadwallader limply smiled.

Miss Liddicoat prepared a breakfast for him, overlooking me; and by drawing on the store of clothing we had found in the tents we soon had him arrayed—as were now the rest of us men—in something more than rags.

Miss Liddicoat seemed most interested in his story. He volunteered to tell her everything. They wandered off into the bush, and did not reappear till midday. On her return she was carrying a great bunch of tropical flowers that reminded me of the bouquet he had sent to her in the cave. Bisscop seemed annoyed.

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE TREASURE

LITTLE as we had noticed it, our sojourn upon the island had changed us all. Indeed, it had re-sorted us. But, occupied as we were with our immediate concerns, we had settled down into our new positions with the smoothness and ease of elements precipitated in some chemical solution. It needed some outside shock, some impact of a foreign body, to enable us to see how far and in what curious directions life on the primitive plane had led us. Such an impact we received by the arrival of Cadwallader. His presence afforded us a fixed standard, a measuring rod, by which we could compare and estimate our development.

Podmore, for instance, had been precipitated from the top of our social system to its dregs. The business magnate, who had made money by that curious kink in the most ordinary brain which makes millionaires, had, now that money

was useless, disclosed himself as an incompetent, cowardly, and foolish weakling. Him we had soon got into the habit of disregarding, except in so far as his inefficiency might have injured our little society. He had become a useless elderly rouseabout, the meek, blundering drudge of the community. But I do not think he had much inclination, or even the time, to brood over his social descent. He accepted his mean value and did as he was told, even by the two women. If he didn't, our society collectively punished him by stinting him in his rations. All that he represented to the clan was a greedy stomach.

Bisscop had, on the other hand, assumed a place in our community that his first appearance and his training had not entitled him to. He was the usual Oxford youth, taught the polite and impracticable nothing that the grey old mother so suavely and so thoroughly teaches. He had never before come into contact with any but his English public-school and university associates—youths of the same unmistakable brand, to whom good form was a god, while character, unless labelled orthodox, was an eccentricity to be deplored and extirpated.

But, with the shipwreck, rude, pitiless and primitive things had intruded upon the smoothness of his life. He found himself faced with hunger and privation and the clamant need

of self-reliance. He had to think things out for himself, and do things for himself. And they were not at all like the things he had been taught to believe the only things that mattered. And he had come through. Beneath all his Oxford affectations of speech and thought he had something like a brain and something called a heart. He had sloughed off his effete civilisation with his creased trousers and his stiff collar, and, I believe, he drew a deep breath of relief. By this time he had come to have a doubt that, after all, Oxford might not have said the last word in modern education. But perhaps he was unfair to his mother. She had not pruned and polished him so assiduously for him to get shipwrecked. There are no ships in Oxford. But now, like Greatheart and, in a lesser degree, myself, he was actually enjoying, at least in superb physical health, our unique experience.

Yes, I confess that my prim, suburban soul had grown uncomfortably large under this new sun. If there are, as we have seen, possibilities of splendour in the soul of a grocer, why should there not be a supra-soul for a sub-editor? At any rate, looking back, I now saw how meanly intricate my life had been, and how blandly simple it could be. Life had dulled me into believing that it consisted in sitting in a sub-



editorial chair through long, clamorous nights, with my nervous fingers on the keyboard of the world, and my narrowly-trained brain evolving a kind of bastard harmony out of the deafening discords that broke on my straining ears. I had become a mere transmitter of the hourly history that the world was so confusedly and so hurriedly making. I had degenerated into a one-sided, delicate, specialised, unwearied machine, liable, by the mere presence of an excess of uric acid, to be thrown hopelessly out of gear.

But now I felt myself expanding in directions unforeseen, bursting out into new impulses, enthusiasms, hopes. I had broadened out in directions that I had long forgotten. I was conscious all through of a new well-being; I rejoiced in the "feel" of my muscles. In Sydney I had only known that I was well by the fact that temporarily I passively missed the familiar nagging of some of my many ailments. Now I thrilled with my new health, I vehemently enthused over my well-being. In short, my matter-of-fact soul and my suburban civilised body had been born again.

And yet I was not altogether content. I missed many things without which, so shackled had I been, I could not be completely happy, even without a daily paper to "put to bed." The trivial absence of braces, I recall, worried

me all through that strenuous time. I had got accustomed to braces, grown into them as a woman grows into a corset. Without them I felt uncomfortable, unclothed. Tobacco was another agony of deprivation. At first, with all of us men, it used to be almost unbearable—so much so that the chance mention of a pipe or a cigar would almost lead to blows. It was the same with the women—and with me—as regards tea. But gradually the open-air life, with its incessant calls upon our energies and its deep and dreamless sleep, had dimmed the sharp, clutching memories of those divine vices.

Yet, when, before burying Sabini, going through the pockets to preserve any of his papers, I found a packet of cigarettes, the tobacco hunger leaped awake in us; and returning from Sabini's grave we carefully divided the treasure trove and tossed up for the odd one.

And another string that tugged at me occasionally was the lack of reading matter. I did not crave for a book; in the happy physical tiredness that came at the end of the full day I should have fallen asleep over it. But a magazine, with silly, sentimental love-stories in it, and pages of pictures that one could idly turn! And O for the bliss of the red-covered Sydney *Bulletin*—that bitter-sweet drug to soothe the nostalgia in the heart of the banished Australian!

You see, I had been too long a sub-editor. If there are no daily papers in Paradise the souls of every journalist will troop to Hades, where there will be plenty, with heaps of horrors to feature, an eternal enemy to criticise, and no libel law.

Miss Rice, except for the lack of tea, had become completely acclimatised. Women are like that. They are born plastic. They can mould their figures or their lack of figure into any absurd shape demanded of them by the male inquisitors of Paris, who have them stretched on the rack of changing fashions. They mould their feet into the impossibly shaped Chinese foot or the high-heeled shoe; and their souls are ready for the mould of the man they love. The average girl can adapt herself as the wife of a plumber or the wife of a statistician—it may merely depend on the one who asked her first.

So Miss Rice, whom a strange providence had forced into the mould of a boarding-house keeper, relapsed, with the relief of a woman getting into *négligé* after a keen day's shopping, into the more natural shape of the primitive woman. She turned all her capabilities, warped so long by the daily need of conciliating or bluffing lodgers, to the provision of comfort for the savages we were. And she did it cheerfully

and uncomplainingly, and lost the hard boarding-house lines that had etched themselves about her kindly mouth.

Miss Liddicoat, however, had nothing behind her artificial prettiness, her embryo mind, clouded with the ghosts of convention, and her youth. She was merely the useless type of pretty girl. Her hair, over the arranging of which she had spent, on the average, one-sixteenth of her conscious life, she had let down, tousled, over her shoulders—for neither brushes nor hair-pins grow on tropical islands—and her nails, once so fiercely manicured and rouged that they had presented the appearance of pink tin, were now broken and, it must be confessed, bitten.

For it was the roughest work of the camp that she had had to do. In that cruel sorting-out enforced upon us by our cruel environment, she had been quickly found out. She was useless out of refined civilisation. Accustomed to the false deference and chivalry of modern society, she had forgotten how to fend for herself; and, when perforce she had to, she proved an incompetent bungler. Each of us was useful to the clan only for what he or she could do; and she could do nothing. So it came to pass, almost without our notice, that the lower and rougher tasks of our common life were given to her; and

if she protested or refused—as, indeed, she did at first—she was punished. So it was in the prehistoric tribe.

Then Cadwallader came. He took this Cinderella from her ashes and throned her in a fairy coach. In one day, with an easy stride, she stepped from the poor drudge of the primitive clan to the polished pedestal of the civilised woman. For from being comparatively useless she had become of inestimable value. She was desired by two men. She took advantage of this dramatic alteration of the pressure of demand and supply.

There was a new animation in her badly freckled face; she even attempted to comb her tangled hair with a spiky bough, and she stuck a red flower in it, with a woman's uncanny knowledge of the exact place where it would do the most damage. If she had only had the appliances she would, I feel sure, have rolled up her tresses into tight sausages, inserted a mattress of horse-hair, and plastered and skewered the sausages all over her head. But she had assuredly rediscovered her waist, defining it with a rope, whose ends she had carefully frayed.

And she put on airs, and developed the immemorial tyranny of the woman made the prize of a conflict between two jealous males. She trod on those two young men's hearts with a



proud heel, even though it was a badly blistered one, and played off the one against the other with the depraved dexterity and cold-blooded inhumanity of the modern girl. She kept one in hell and the other in heaven for half a day, and in the afternoon, with a smile, a glance, a pout, she had beautified the one and damned the other. For these two foolish young men had made their own heaven and hell; and its name was Jean Liddicoat.

She, who had been the unnoticed drudge of the clan—for even Bisscop dared not relieve her of her worst tasks, he had enough of his own to do—now came radiantly forth as a lady. She had at her finger-beck two abject, able-bodied males. She had forgotten Nietzsche's terrible whip. So had they.

. . . . .

Miss Rice came down from her cave only for meals; and, usually after a passage with the grocer's nurse, retired sullenly to her unpolluted sanctuary.

Within a couple of days Greatheart had entirely recovered. But he was no longer the lordly Greatheart of old. He had the dazed look of the lover, unable properly to focus any object save his lady's eyes. He and the girl shunned the camp. They transformed the

tracks through the scrub and the expanse of beach into lovers' walks. Indeed, with the trio of Bisscop, Cadwallader and Miss Liddicoat, and the grocer and his girl, the atmosphere of the island became decidedly sheepish. For Podmore and myself our Eden was as dull as doubtless it had been for the snake.

There was now no talk of searching for the treasure. Three of the men were on a more exciting quest; they had their treasure handy. One morning, however, I managed to snare Cadwallader while Miss Liddicoat was doing her hair, and tried to get him to take an interest in the clue. The sole bit of information he was able to give me was that he believed the figures in the list of items were really measurements of distances. Thus the 217 pounds of sugar was probably 217 feet, or yards, or inches, from one point to another. At first sight the suggestion looked as if it might be of value. But how could you measure a box of aerated waters with a musician's triangle, or a spade with watered silk? But, having no love-affairs on my hands, the mystery of the puzzle intrigued me.

One day I left the deserted camp and wandered down to the beach, in the recurrent hope that this dull ending of our adventures might be relieved by the appearance of the long-delayed search steamer. The horizon was, as usual,

unbroken. I sat down by the edge of the scrub and idly pondered, once again, the useless clue.

A shadow fell across the paper. I looked up to find Greatheart and the girl regarding me. They had seen me on their aimless stroll.

"Still worrying over the paper?" Greatheart laughed. "What's the good? What do we want with treasure when——"

He looked the sheepish look of the engaged young man at his miraculous woman. He had found all the treasure there was in the world.

"Look at that rock," the girl idly said, pointing to the white rock that, struck by the sun, shone brightly against the foliage of the jungle behind. "It looks almost as if it was made of nice, clean salt."

"Salt?" Greatheart echoed, startled from his blissful ecstasy. "A rock that looks like salt? So it does. And"—he frowned, in search of some vague memory—"where did I hear of rocks and salt before? Ah, rock-salt!" Then, triumphantly he chanted, "One ton rock-salt!"

He snatched the paper from my hands. "Here it is," he said, trembling, "as plain as a pike-staff. '1 ton rock-salt.' Let me see. There's the double-branched cocoa-nut, and now the rock that looks like salt. We've found the key to the clue!"

"Cadwallader says," I eagerly interposed, "that he believes the figures in this list are measurements of distances. So if we get these two points to start with we ought to be able to discover the track that leads straight to the treasure."

"Yes," he replied. Then, with another glance at the list, "But where are the cork-screw and the carpenter's T-square and the watered silk?"

"We'll find them. Look, we've got these two starting points. It's like a surveyor's base line. If once we measure the distance between the rock and the cocoa-nut palm we'll have the distances of the other landmarks."

"Yes," Greatheart said; "but the rock is not the second item on the list. There's the watered silk and the carpenter's T-square and the sugar in between. That complicates matters, doesn't it?"

The three of us scrutinised the paper. Our difficulties were but begun. Here were the first puzzling items:

- 1 tin condensed milk (double-headed cocoa-nut brand).
- 305 yards watered silk.
- 1 carpenter's T-square.
- 217 lbs. sugar (cheapest quality).
- 1 ton rock-salt.

"Our starting point," I said, as we hurried across the sands, "is the double-headed palm. Now, let's measure the distance between it and the rock."

"No," the grocer replied, "let's start at the beginning. We'll try the first figures, 305 yards from the palm."

We paced off the distance in a direct line in the direction of the rock, and stopped at 305 yards, quite a long distance from it. There was no sign of a carpenter's T-square. We then tried measuring the same distance in the opposite direction, and then made a rough circle with a radius of 305 yards from the palm as centre. A careful scrutiny of this circumference revealed nothing that we could construe as a sign-post.

The girl thought a moment. "Look here," she said "we haven't tried to find out what watered silk represents, have we?"

"Well," I said, "what does it represent?"

She shook her head.

"What does it look like?" Greatheart asked.

"It's silk that's got a watery sheen," the girl explained, glancing idly along the beach. "Like—like——" Suddenly she straightened her lithe figure. "Look!" she cried, pointing.

We looked. All we saw was a stretch of wet sand, shining smoothly in the sun.



"Don't you see?" she impatiently cried. "Doesn't the wet sand *look* like watered silk with the sunlight on it?"

It did. Eagerly we paced the distance along the water's edge. Our goal was nothing but sand. We tried in the opposite direction. Again no result.

The girl seized the paper. "I carpenter's T-square," she read. "What's a carpenter's square like?"

"It's just a letter 'T,'" Greatheart explained, "with inches marked on the edges. It is used to draw lines at right angles to other lines. I see! It means that we are standing on one of the lines of the 'T,' and that now we have to go in a direction at right angles to it"—he looked at the paper—"for 217 lbs. of sugar, cheapest quality."

"Two hundred and seventeen yards," I suggested. "But where's the sugar?"

"Cheapest quality," the girl added with a smile.

"You know all about sugar," I suggested, turning to the grocer. "Can't you give us a hint?"

He couldn't.

Then I had my illumination. "What's the cheapest quality of sugar adulterated with?"

"Mine," said the grocer solemnly, "even the cheapest quality, was never adulterated."

I laughed. "The comic papers insist that it's mostly sand."

"Sand?" he cried. "I never thought of that."

"Here it is," I said. "Yards and yards of it. All we've got to do is to go 217 yards across it at right angles to the shore line, and we'll strike the next item—the ton of rock-salt."

"The white rock!" the girl cried.

Quickly we paced off the 217 yards, and were brought up blankly in the midst of the sand near the scrub. Thinking that we had not accurately measured the distance, we tried again. The white rock was away to our left.

"I see," said Greatheart. "We've started from the wrong end of our base-line. Let's try the same distance from the point, this distance on the other side of the palm."

And 217 yards from that point brought us to within a few feet of the rock. We had measured our base-line. The rest would depend merely on our being able to recognise the sign-posts leading us to the treasure. Excitedly we scrutinised the next directions.

1 musician's triangle.

1 cork-screw.

73 loads garden soil.

With the carpenter's T-square in our minds we had little trouble over the triangle. It was evidently a sign indicating direction. A musician's triangle is roughly an equilateral triangle. It was an indication that we should turn off at an angle of 60 degrees.

We marked off two big equilateral triangles on the sand, taking as their base the direction in which we had approached the rock. These gave us the choice of branching at the indicated angle either to the right or the left. We chose the left, as it pointed toward the scrub that hid the stream. At the entrance of the scrub we found ourselves at the beginning of the ancient track, the meaning of which had so puzzled us.

"One cork-screw—that must mean something that twists round and round," the girl suggested.

"This winding track!" Greatheart exclaimed. "It's cork-screwy enough, isn't it?"

"It leads to the stream," I said.

"No," the girl cried, "to the treasure. We're getting warm."

"Wait a minute," Greatheart called, as I was setting off. "There's another direction here—73 loads of garden soil."

"Garden soil?" the girl laughed. "That's just earth. And we've left the sand for the earth. This rich loam beneath the trees would be just the stuff for the garden. Come on."

We paced the 73 yards of the track, following as well as we could its old, overgrown, original windings. But before the full distance was measured the track had led us right through the scrub. The distance was only 54 yards. After a moment's halt, however, we went on pacing, striking straight from the jungle to the water's edge. And it was, we made it, just 72 yards to that point.

Hurriedly we referred to the clue. It read: "1 box aerated waters."

Water? Water! This was water; and on the swiftly running stream sailed a fleet of tiny bubbles. Aerated!

The girl and I splashed through the ford we had made on first coming to the cave. But the grocer turned and went back to the tent. He emerged, as we stood impatiently waiting on the other side of the stream, and shouted to us, asking us if we had seen a spade anywhere?

I went back and helped in the search. If there was a treasure within reach we would want a spade. The men-strangers had brought spades with them; but now, to our surprise, there was no sign of them. We could not make it out.

"We can come back, and look again," I suggested impatiently. "The first thing is to locate the treasure."

"Right-o," he replied. "But it worries me what could have become of those spades."

At the other side of the stream, a few yards from where we had crossed it, was the track up the cliff that led to the narrow ledge.

"One plumb-bob," Greatheart read. "And then a carpenter's level."

"Plumb-bob," I echoed. "I think I've heard of it. It's a thing used to get things perpendicular by carpenters and surveyors. It's only a lead weight on a string. Of course, that means that we must go up—up the cliff till we come to a level place. And that must be the level ledge."

So far was plain sailing. But as we stood on the narrow ledge the next direction, "35 tons soap (Sunset brand)" brought us to a full stop.

Were we to be baulked at the last? Soap told us nothing. And the narrow path continued in both directions, towards and away from the cave. This latter track, not so clearly defined as the one we so constantly used, we had never thoroughly explored.

"Sunset brand?" the girl softly wondered. "Never heard of a soap with that name. Sunset?"

"Sunset! Look!" I called. "The sun is setting now. And its rays lie right along the



track. It means that we must go in that direction—to the west.”

We paced the thirty-five yards along the ledge. It brought us a yard or so beyond the entrance to our cave; the cave we had sheltered in so long, the cave in which we had lived without a suspicion that it held the treasure we had so uselessly sought!

“There’s only one direction left,” Greatheart said, with a tremble in his voice. “It’s ‘one spade.’ That can only mean ‘Dig!’ All we’ve got to do now is to turn up the soil in the cave. I wish we had found that spade.”

“Anyhow, we’ll have a try with my tomahawk,” I urged.

But as we pressed forward, each eager to be the first, a figure confronted us in the doorway of the cave. It was Miss Rice.

A surprised and jealous Miss Rice.

“What do you want here, in my cave?” she shrilled. “Can’t you stay down in your camp. You”—she faced the girl—“can’t you leave me alone? You’ve got him. How dare you come trapesing here with him at your skirt? How dare you flaunt him in my face now? Go away!”

“But,” Greatheart gasped, pushing forward in his eagerness, “we’ve found out where the treasure is! We’ve actually deciphered the clue!”

"Is that all?" the fury shrieked.

"But you don't know," the grocer expostulated. "Why, it's actually buried in——"

"In my cave," Miss Rice haughtily informed him. "I found it myself, days ago. And I've dug it all up, with a spade I got in the camp. I knew it was there"—she looked pityingly at me—"that day you buried the clue with me, and found that piece of silk inlaid with silver. The rest of the stuff was below that hole. If you'd only dug a couple of inches deeper, even you would have discovered it."

"But why didn't you tell us?" I asked.

"A lot of use it would have been telling you."

"But why?"

"Because the whole of your precious treasure is worth about twopence halfpenny."

She saw the look of incredulity on our faces; and with a grim lip she selected, and handed to us, three of the stock of torches at the cave mouth. We entered, lit them at the little fire, and saw the treasure—also two spades. The great bales and casks stood half-revealed in the big hole she had so laboriously dug. Some were broken open; others lay untouched in the trench; white and coloured materials lay scattered about where in her haste she had flung them.

"All useless," the lady said.

“But that’s impossible,” I rejoined. “Nobody in his senses would take the trouble to bury all this stuff if it was valueless, to say nothing of the difficulty of carting it all up the cliff.”

“Well, look for yourselves,” the guardian genie of the treasure grimly replied. “But I’ve looked through almost everything, and I’ve found nothing of any possible value.”

“But in these other bales—these casks unopened?”

“It wasn’t worth while,” she smiled. “Look, half-way through my search I came across this.”

She picked up from the floor a stained sheet of parchment. We crowded round to read it, holding our torches close. This is what the parchment contained:

“INVOYCE OF TREASURE BURY’D HERE, 1791.

1 cask agates, greate and small.

1 bale silk strypt with silver.

152 bookes of fine white calicoes.

5 bales of fine Muzlins.

2 boxes Jasper Antonio, or Stone of Goa.

422 bushells of cloves and nutmegs.”

“That’s the list of the whole lot,” Miss Rice broke in on our blank silence. “I’ve counted the stuff and checked it with this list, which they had buried with it.”

"But no gold or silver, or pearls?" Greatheart appealed to our common sense. "I can't understand it."

"Nor could I at first; but I see it all now," said Miss Rice, taking pity upon our disappointment. "Don't you see? The things in this list and buried so carefully here *were* treasures—when they were buried."

"And they aren't valuable now," I suggested. "You mean that they've all been spoilt and ruined by their having been buried here so long?"

"Not at all. Agates don't spoil; and though the silk striped with silver hasn't lasted well, the silver won't be worth the trouble of carrying away. But all these things were valuable, very valuable, when the owners hid them away so carefully—over two hundred years ago. But none of them are valuable now. To the people who buried them, agates were precious stones, and jasper was a rarity—therefore immensely valuable. But nobody would pay for agates or jasper now, except by the cartload. Look at them!"

She dipped her fingers into a broken box at her feet and lifted a handful of dull, variegated chalcedony—pretty enough in a barbaric way, but of no practical use to modern jewellers.

"We can wear one or two of these each as

mementoes of our experience," she added, with a sad smile.

"But the other things?" Greatheart eagerly insisted.

"Calico was valuable then, no doubt; but nowadays we can buy it cheap in any suburban shop. And there are one hundred and fifty books of it here. The same with muslins; and as for these casks all painted red, they're chock-full of cloves and nutmegs."

She turned with a grim smile to the grocer. "*You* know how much cloves and nutmegs are a pound!"



## CHAPTER XV

## THE PIRATE

THAT was the end of our treasure hunt. Though we turned over every inch of the floor of the cave, and ransacked every cask and bale, not one coin of gold, not one ingot of silver, not one jewel of any value did we unearth. Miss Rice had been before us; she had searched with the meticulous care of the perfect boarding-house keeper. Where she had failed we were foolish to try.

The thing, after all, was quite simple. What the unknown men so long ago had so painstakingly and so thoroughly hidden *was* treasure. What we had so eagerly dug up was the same thing, but no longer valuable. Spices and nutmegs were in those old days the fruits of arduous adventure in distant and dangerous tropical islands, got by strategy or murder; muslins and calicoes were the fabulous products of the unexplored East, seized or stolen, and subject to all the risks of long transport over strange seas, scoured by pirates, in vessels small and crowded

and unsafe. If those fair cargoes came safely home through all those lurking perils, their value to the merchant adventurers was more than their weight in gold.

I could, in fancy, see these forerunners of ours on this tropical island laboriously bringing the great casks and bales from the wrecked galleon, hauling them, with curses and sweat, severally up the steep cliff and along the narrow cliff path, and lovingly lowering them into the great oblong hole they had so carefully dug in the cave. And then, after I know not what privations, what hates and quarrels and recriminations, what callous or impulsive murders, maybe, embarking on the raft that was to carry them back to civilisation, or leave them to perish in a welter of wild ocean. Yet one must have escaped with the knowledge of the great treasure got together by such wild risks, and safely hidden against his return to make him richer than any in his little Spanish town. There was the carefully written invoice, written, strangely enough, in English. Who was that adventuring Englishman, perhaps the only one of the crew that could write? A rascal like themselves, throwing in his lot with them on the fierce quest of wealth, or, more probably, a prisoner, to be slain as soon as he had served his turn? None could

say. At least, we did not find his bones in the cave.

But neither he nor the others who got back to Spain had ever been able to return to gloat over this fabulous wealth of those forgotten times. And we had come two centuries too late. The treasure had lain there these long years, secure and unhurt, protected against decay by the absence of damp in the cave. Yet, unchanging, it deteriorated, for past it, and the need of it, the great world was moving on. Little by little the things that were rare and precious had become trifles of little value; little by little the East has disgorged its secrets and its stores; little by little machinery had come to cheapen the priceless products of hand-looms and patient, cunning fingers—and now what had been a luxury for the use of kings was a common commodity accessible to the poorest. All the wealth of the cave had vanished, yet it was still there, unhurt, untampered with. It had remained as it was; only Time had swept over it, as it sweeps over everything, and beneath its ruthless slow fingering the wealth of that old world had crumbled into dust.

They must have had gold and silver and jewels, too. Perhaps they loaded their rude raft with it; and in their last madness of thirst had flung the golden handfuls into the merci-

lessly waiting sea. Perhaps they had buried it elsewhere, where it is, to this day, waiting in its unseen crypt. Perhaps, after all, it went down with the galleon on the reef; perhaps it was there, strewn over the ocean floor, and making in that rocky reef rich pockets of minted gold.

Well, as far as we were concerned, there it might stay.

. . . . .

Next morning Miss Rice, as usual, retired to the solitude of her cave. Since the fiasco of the treasure hunt Greatheart had relapsed contentedly into the doating content of the happy lover. I doubt if he noticed Miss Rice's presence at all.

I was lying idly in the shade of the tent, watching her lean little figure in its tattered ulster climb nimbly to her retreat. There, at least, she was safe from the sight of the triumph of her rival. I saw her on her high platform throw one glance round; then she stood a moment rigid, arrested by something she saw. One glance was enough for her. She called out something to us, wildly waving her scraggy arm in the direction of the sea.

I would not allow myself to believe that it

could be the relief ship. But eagerly I called to the others; and we climbed, pell-mell, up to the cave. Miss Rice met us with two words, shrilled triumphantly, "The ship!"

From our height we looked. It was the ship, at last!

There, standing boldly into the cove, was the long looked for vessel. But at the first glance a doubt assailed me. This did not look like a ship chartered to search for us. It was merely a small vessel; and there was a disconcerting strangeness about her rig. We had had one disastrous experience of visitors. Were we to have another?

"It's such a curious looking craft," Greatheart muttered uneasily. Then, his face lit with a sudden suspicion, he sprang at Cadwallader.

"It's your crowd back again!" he exclaimed, grappling with that youth.

Bisscop and I helped him, and in a trice we had Cadwallader secure.

But as we paused to get our breath after that strenuous struggle—Cadwallader was an athlete—we were assailed by a tornado. It was a frenzied Miss Liddicoat, fighting with nails and teeth for her lover. It was Bisscop who received most of the scratches.

I kept her off as gently as I could; and then



Cadwallader, who had been struggling to speak, managed to make himself heard.

“Rot!” he gasped. “I don’t know anything about it. It isn’t our schooner. Can’t you see that? And they wouldn’t be such fools as to come in in broad daylight, would they? Why”—he looked attentively at the strange craft—“it isn’t like any craft that I’ve ever seen.”

Still with our grasp on him we scrutinised our visitant. The craft was long and low, and—it seemed absurd to use the word—it looked sinister. The sails she carried were old and picturesquely patched; and the rig, to me who knew nothing of sailing vessels, seemed clumsy and, yes, old-fashioned. And then a memory rose up; I had seen ships like that pictured in the adventure books I had read when a boy. The incredulous thought came that I was looking on the sort of ship that once had struck terror in the heart of all who had chanced to meet it—the pirate ship of romance!

Something of the same nightmare idea had dawned in the startled faces of the others. And Cadwallader was plainly as much amazed as we.

Then a remarkable thing happened. As the vessel came gracefully straight on toward the land, we made out the Union Jack flying bravely at the peak. But as she approached, sweeping in with a kind of evil swiftness—a swiftness that

was not accounted for by the light breeze blowing—the flag fluttered down from the mast-head, and in its place a ball of black quickly climbed. As it reached the top the black ball broke ; and clear to our incredulous eyes we saw the grim flag of the pirate—upon a ground of black the ghastly white of the skull and cross-bones !

Were we dreaming, all enmeshed in the same hideous nightmare ? We looked to each other for some denial of what we had so plainly seen ; but on each face was the same clouded amaze. Then, somewhat shamefacedly, we let Cadwalader go. What perils threatened us certainly were not to be looked for in his quarter.

Miss Liddicoat was too astonished even to comfort him.

“ But—but—— ” stammered Podmore, “ it can’t be. It’s impossible.”

“ Anyway,” said Bisscop, “ I’m going down to find out what it all means.”

“ No,” Greatheart interposed. “ There’s something wrong about that boat. It’s so damnably incredible. I don’t like the look of it. There *aren’t* pirates with black flags nowadays.”

“ But mightn’t there be one, forgotten, overlooked, still sailing these out-of-the-way seas ? ” Miss Rice murmured ecstatically, a strange childish light coming into her bright little eyes.

"Impossible!" Podmore grunted. "It wouldn't be allowed. How could I go on importing things from England if there were pirates to sink my consignments? Why, business would be ruined. No," he flung his accusation at the strange girl, "this is only another of your confounded tricks, madam!"

"No," she cried. "I must be mad like the rest of you. And yet I saw that black flag go up before my eyes. It's there yet."

"After all," the grocer said shyly, a boyish look sunning his eager face, "mightn't there be pirates, *real* pirates, after all? It's—it's too good to be true. I always believed in pirates when I was a youngster. I wanted to be one myself, but I never had the courage to run away and go pirating. What if, somehow, boys were right, after all?" He paused, abashed at the magnificence of his theory. "If there only were!" he ecstatically breathed.

I could see now that no matter how Life hammered at the soul of the little grocer, he would always be invulnerable. He was—he had always been—the credulous, incalculable, romantic child.

Yet there, before our eyes, was the miracle of the real thing.

"If these are pirates," I said grimly, "they'll cut our blessed throats, that's all."

"Better stay here—we're safe here—and see what they do next," Podmore counselled with a shiver of fear.

It seemed to us good advice.

"Look," Cadwallader cried, "they're shortening sail. They're going to anchor."

It was, had we eyes to appreciate it, a graceful sight as that strange vessel came to rest beneath bare poles, swinging at her anchor in the shelter of the cove, close to the shore. She seemed to have but a small crew; but from what we could discover from our distance their costumes had here and there a barbaric note of scarlet, crude yellow and blue. And they were evidently busy on some work that at first we naturally took to be the lowering of a boat.

But it was no boat that we saw. It was a plank shoved over the side of the vessel. And before we grasped the function it was to fulfil we saw lifted on to it a figure, apparently pinioned, and, as we guessed from the note of white on its face, gagged. He made a few clumsy, reluctant steps forward.

Then we knew the horrible truth. Behind that solitary figure stood another, a menacing figure with a red handkerchief round its head, and in its raised hand something that we knew was a pistol. The doomed man was being made to walk the plank!

Distant though we were, the clear air gave us vividly the full horror of that incredible tragedy. From the bulwarks and the lower rigging the callous crew stared curiously down as the poor wretch made his faltering progress along the slender, sagging plank. Behind him stood the ruffian with the pistol; and we could guess the ribald laughter that hurried their prisoner to his doom.

Suddenly he stopped, as if waiting for the shot mercifully to end his torture. He half-turned and flung out some desperate sneer at his tormentors. But the ruffians knew their sport better than that. So he took the final steps with, I thought, a defiant swagger.

The women shrieked as they saw the body fall sideways; and involuntarily, sick with the sight, we all turned our heads away.

When we ventured to look again there was no sign of the man. But the ship had been swinging to her anchor, and by this time the plank was mercifully hidden from our gaze by the ship's counter.

"How could we have saved him?" Great-heart groaned, in answer to the agonised reproach in the women's eyes.

But other things were happening in swift succession on the ship. First a boat was lowered, and into it a number of bulky packages



were quickly lowered. Then down the ship's side came two figures. The second one we recognised as the man with the red handkerchief around his head.

"That's the captain, the pirate-chief," Miss Rice said, with an unwilling hero-worship. "And the other man must be his lieutenant."

The latter took the oars and the captain the rudder; and the laden boat made its way to the beach. What the packages were and what the pirates' purpose on this island we could not guess.

But we soon saw. They beached the boat and proceeded to unload its cargo. Then each took up a package and, the captain leading, made their way straight to the double-branched cocoa-nut palm. Depositing their loads at its foot, they returned to the boat, and conveyed another load to the palm. A third trip sufficed. Then out of one of the bundles they produced spades and began busily to dig in the sand.

"It's our treasure they're after," Greatheart exclaimed. "The gold that we didn't find in the cave must have been buried right under the cocoa-nut palm. We've missed it, and they've come for it!"

"But who," Miss Rice breathed, in awed tones, "are *they*?"

In the silence that followed each of us thought the same mad thought. It was Greatheart who gave it solemn utterance.

"The men who buried it there, two hundred years ago, or, my God, their ghosts! Come on!" he added suddenly, "I can't stand this any longer. If they're ghosts they can't harm living men; and, if they're not, we're going to make them explain the reason of that cold-blooded murder—at the points of our revolvers!"

Instantly we men followed our leader as he sprang up. Any move was better than this maddening inaction. We trooped after him along the ledge; and, as I got to the level ground at the base of the cliff, I looked back and saw that close behind us were crowding the women. It was either courage of a high degree that had prompted them or fear of being left alone in this island of menaces.

Seeing them following, Greatheart had not the heart to order them back, nor, had he done so, would they have gone. So, closing up our ranks, he led the way into the scrub. I do not know what made me glance back as I followed him—some instinct, perhaps—but I saw, on the top of the cliff, directly over our deserted cave, a monstrous form: a grotesque thing of black,

standing on thin legs, impossible, unhuman, unreal! It looked like some bird, some enormous terrible carrion thing perched menacingly above our unprotected heads, ready for its hideous swoop.

I turned my gaze shudderingly away. I did not know what it was, bird or beast or fiend. I could not fit its grotesque shape into any form that I had read of or dreamed. No; I did not want to know what it was. The one thing I forced my mind to hold fast to was the paramount necessity for me to preserve my sanity.

So I fled, head down, through the twisted forest, as through the horrors of a nightmare.

But as we paused, agape, at the further edge of the scrub, the thing that was being enacted on the sand beneath the double-headed palm was more fantastically unreal than anything that had gone before.

A great trench had been dug in the sand, and into it the two barbarically attired men were lowering the last of the packages. The one with the red handkerchief round his red, straggly hair, was tall, and in his costume barbarically splendid. His bright blue sash of silk was stuck full of great silver-hafted pistols and murderous-looking sheath knives. His white shirt, open at the neck, showed a hairy chest;

but his hands were fine, slender fingered, and white as a lady's. And his wrists were enclosed in cuffs of filmy lace. His face, with its long, red, drooping moustache, was the most sinister face I had ever seen.

The other was a squat, swarthy, heavily bearded man, dressed in the same picturesque style, but without any of the evidences of the fine dandy that gave his chief such a distinguished appearance. This man was evidently a villain of the common order, and obviously apprehensive of the suave, cold politeness that marked the bearing of his captain.

"We're wrong," Greatheart whispered. "They're not searching for the treasure. They're burying it!"

"That's the treasure they brought in the boat," Bisscop muttered. "Let's hope it's not nutmegs!"

Then the climax to the strange drama unexpectedly came. As the squat dark man stooped over the last package, carefully lowering it into place in the trench, the pirate captain stepped daintily behind him, quietly pulled a pistol from his belt and shot the man in the back!

The dead man crumpled up and fell face downward, with clawing hands, into the grave on top of the treasure.

It was enough. Whether ghosts or fiends or

pirates, we could not stand by without an effort to avenge that brutal and callous murder.

We rushed from our shelter, revolvers in hand, straight for that figure standing, with his back to us, calmly looking down on his fell work.

His sharp ears caught the sounds of our pell-mell approach; and he flung round, with the most amazed consternation I had ever seen on a human face.

And close to us, from the grove of cocoa-nuts behind us, a voice roared:

"Stand back, you blasted fools! What the blithering Hades do you think you're doing? Put up them toy fire-arms before you do any more damage!"

We turned uncertainly to the new voice. At the base of a palm a figure stood, the figure of a very hot and very angry young man, dressed in dirty white. And he was manipulating on its tripod a black, bulky thing—a cinematograph camera!

Shamefacedly I recognised it as merely another of the things that had so scared me on the top of the cliff.

The bathetic truth dawned on us. We had stumbled on a realistic photo-drama, enacted by a company of actors with all the tropical background necessary for its realism.

The angry young operator advanced to us.



"Why can't you act your own drama—a shipwreck stunt, I suppose—without interfering with ours? You've spoiled forty feet of the best film I've ever taken. And we're rather short of films on the ship. And now, thanks to you, I'll have to do this last scene of 'Captain Kidd Burying the Pirates' Treasure' all over again!"

We could not gather our scattered senses together for a reply.

Captain Kidd bent down, pulled his fellow-actor, unhurt, from the trench, and strolled over to us.

"I'm not sorry," he smiled, pulling the red bandana from his head, and, incidentally, bringing with it his wig of fiery red. "Acting a strenuous part like this in these clothes is no joke under this sun. Any pubs in this suburb?"

"What's your game?" asked his mate, removing his shaggy beard with a sigh of relief. "We hadn't an idea there was another photocrowd on this island. Doing a castaway shipwreck act, I suppose? We meant to do one, too. Who are you working it for?"

"Say," said Captain Kidd, in what he meant to be a stage aside, "they've got a peach of a leading lady, haven't they?" He glanced admiringly at the girl in her costume of silver. "And the low comedian"—he looked Podmore over critically—"he doesn't need to pad, any-

how. And that scarecrow in the ulster"—he referred to Miss Rice—"we've got no old lady so shriekingly funny as that!"

All speaking at once, and all indignant, we managed to convey to the cinematograph operator and the two actors that we were not members of a rival film concern. Even the flashing splendour of the girl was at last explained to the astonished strangers.

Learning that there was plenty of water and the possibility of our adding something to give it a taste at our camp, Captain Kidd and his companion in villainy suggested an immediate adjournment thither; but the operator insisted on them finishing their act. So we waited, interested spectators, behind the camera while Captain Kidd shot his friend over again and gloated over the body. Then the camera was stopped while the pirate helped the dead man out of the trench, and sent him back to us. Then the camera operator turned his handle again, while Captain Kidd, with an evil smile, piled the sand on top of the body that was no longer there, filled up the trench, and, with a magnificent gesture of triumphant villainy, strode down to the boat.

"Yes," the operator explained as he packed up. "We sent another operator on shore last night. He climbed up the cliff behind there to

get a bird's-eye view of the pirate ship entering the cove and hoisting the black flag. He also took a distance view of the walking the plank stunt; but we've got another camera on board which took that act at close quarters, as well. It'll be the greatest film ever produced. Ought to be, too, considering the expense of fitting out that ship to make her look like the real piratical thing—her sails are only for show; she's got a splendid oil engine in her. We never imagined that there'd be anybody here. We heard that this was an uninhabited island, and it was just the spot for the scene."

"Yes, of course," he went on, in answer to the question in our eyes, "we'll take you back to civilisation. But now you're here, I'd like to get a few pictures of you. What about 'The Castaways Having Their First Meal'? In those things it ought to be the real thing. And that property elephant of yours. I say, dearie," he turned eagerly to the girl, "you'll pose on the elephant for a picture, won't you? Pity about the tame tiger. He would have been great. Why, I'll write a drama round the whole thing; it'll beat any of those American Out-West dramas."

Well, we did our best to help our rescuers in their work. And we were glad to learn that the ship meant to sail that evening. The women

learnt that as there were ladies in the company aboard the clothing difficulty would be solved.

Towards sunset we were ready to start.

"I say," said Captain Kidd, to Greatheart, 'what are you going to do with that property elephant? Turn him loose?'"

"No," said the grocer. "He'll come with us."

"But we can't take him on board."

"We are not going on board."

The girl put her hand confidently in his.

"We're going to live here."

"You see," said Greatheart the Magnificent, "there's nothing to take us back. This is the sort of life we like—the only life we could live now. Go back to civilisation and stiff collars and grocers' shops? Absurd. What has civilisation for me that I haven't found here?"

His fond eyes rested on the strange girl's face.

"It's such a charming quiet spot, isn't it, for a honeymoon?" she said, with a happy blush.

There was no answer to that.

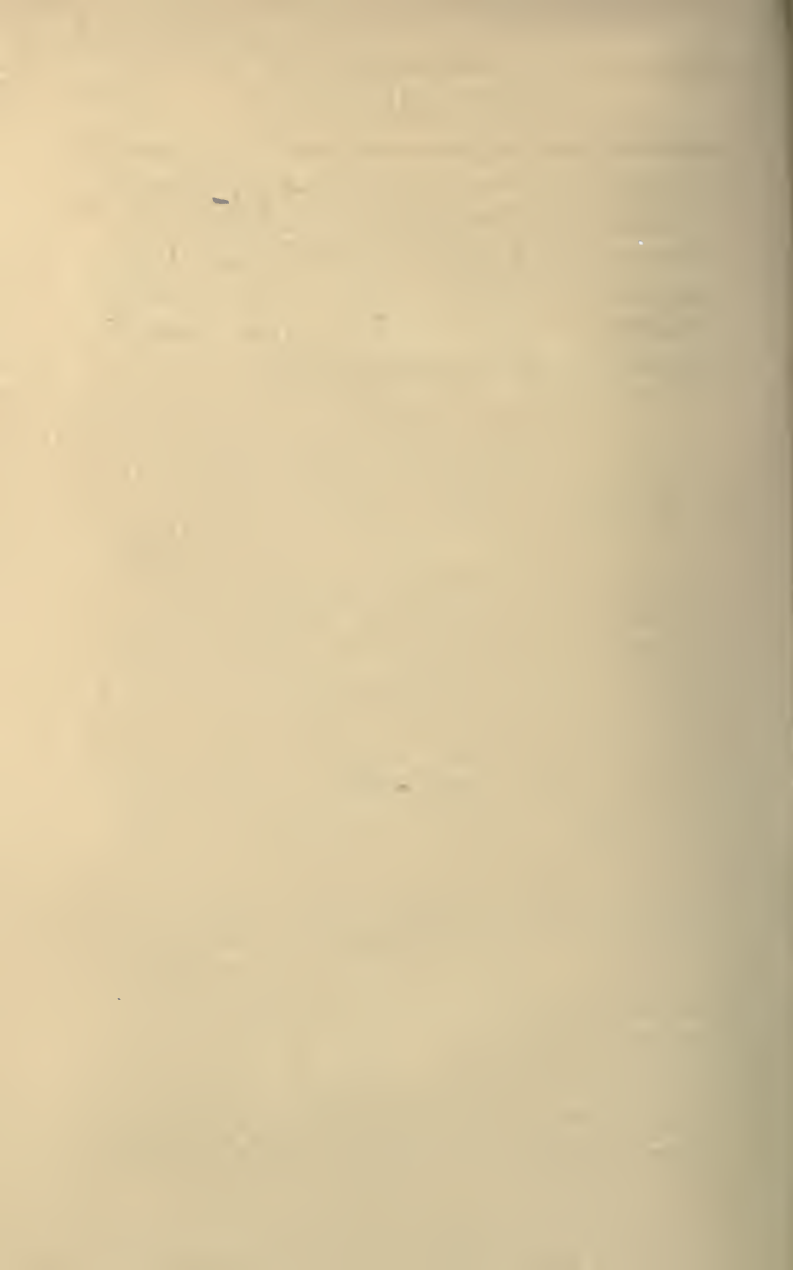
The last we saw of them as the boat stood waiting for us at the beach was the elephant, in his gorgeous trappings of scarlet, and on his shoulders she in her glittering cuirass of silver, and in the tiny howdah he leaning forward,

without backward glance at us. So they passed ponderously, barbarically magnificent, along the beach and disappeared into the jungle.

And this scene—and incidentally Miss Rice's attitude of despairing horror—was carefully recorded on the perspiring cinematograph operator's last hundred feet of film.

THE END





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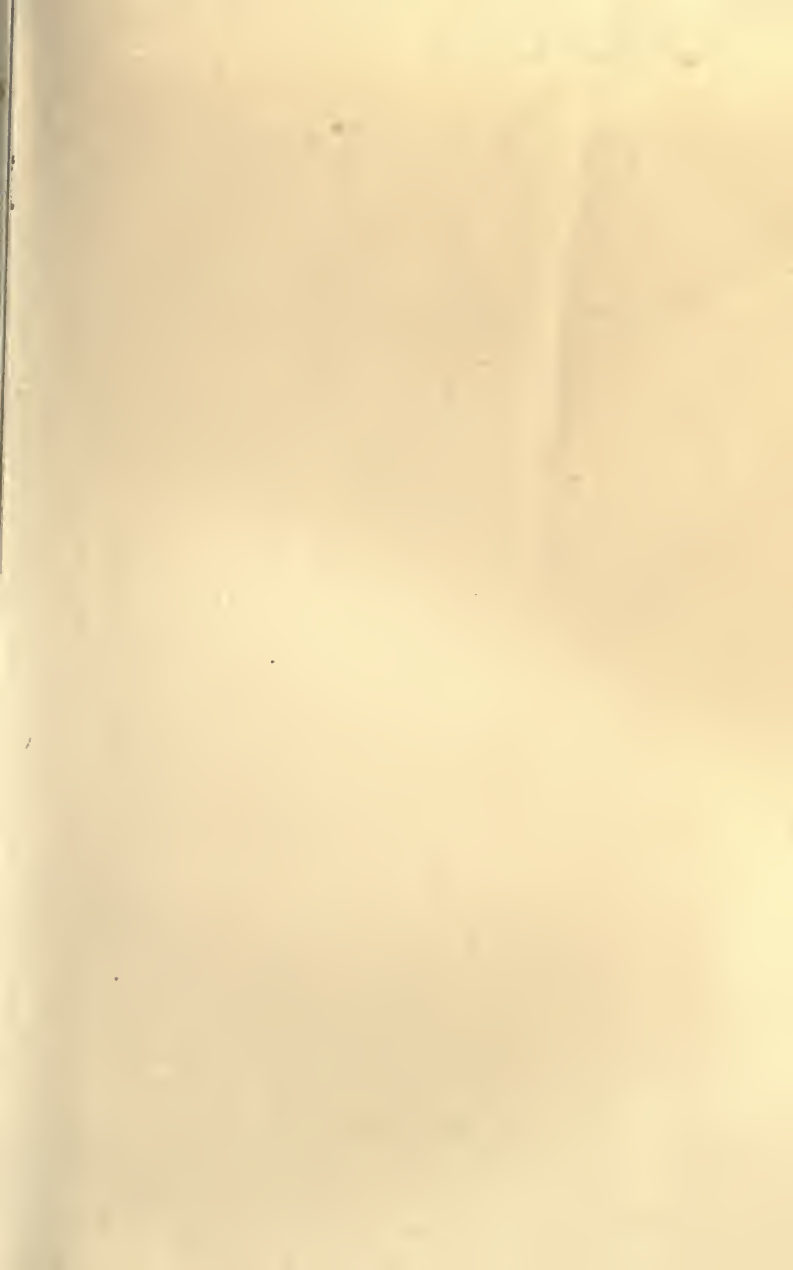
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